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COMMONWEAL

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CORRESPONDENCE

Media study revisited

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: In your response to my recent letter [Correspondence, June 14], you remark that the study "Media Coverage of the Catholic Church" arrives at a conclusion of "bias against the church" on the part of several elite media. But the study does *not* reach this conclusion, a fact noted many times by its principal author, S. Robert Lichter, since its publication in March. It gives an account of what the media have done but expresses no opinion on the bias question.

Quite a few readers have concluded that the situation the study depicts does reflect bias. Others, apparently including the editors of *Commonweal*, hold that it doesn't. For what it may be worth, my view is that bias may be too thin a word to express the complex problem it depicts. In any case, it misrepresents "Media Coverage of the Catholic Church" to say that it attributes bias to the media when in fact it does not.

RUSSELL SHAW

The writer is director of the office of public information of the Knights of Columbus, a sponsor of the study.

The editors reply:

First, we can't argue with Mr. Shaw over "the situation [the study] depicts" because in our opinion it doesn't depict a real situation; that is, its findings about negative media images of the church were predetermined (and vastly inflated) by its methodology. As we argued ["Thinskinny," May 17], the very first example offered in the study to show how its authors analyzed news items demonstrated a highly developed capacity for missing the point.

In more direct response: It is true that no single statement in the study explains those alleged negative images by accusing the media of bias. On the other hand, it's clear to us why Mr. Lichter has so often had to deny making such an accusation. Consider:

The first paragraph of the study's

Executive Summary refers to "the long history of anti-Catholic prejudice in American society." The first sentence of the Introduction reads: "Anti-Catholicism has deep roots in American life." We take these to be topic sentences, telling us what this study is about. Another controlling passage (p. 10) says that the way to test whether journalists are fair and impartial (i.e., free of bias) is to examine the coverage they produce. The study then produces statistics based on content analysis purporting to show that in the coverage of the Catholic church by five major news outlets, the church was "overwhelmingly" portrayed as "an oppressive or authoritarian institution," a "beleaguered authority struggling to enforce its traditions and views on a reluctant constituency."

In his own letter of transmissal accompanying our review copy of the study, Mr. Shaw quotes its passage about "the long history of anti-Catholic prejudice in American society," cites its finding that contemporary news accounts repeatedly depict the church as conservative, oppressive, and irrelevant, and concludes: "This is, frankly, a troubling record." That is still not an explicit accusation of widespread journalistic bias, but anyone who misses the implication needs a refresher course in Logic 101.

Finally, *Commonweal* did not say and does not believe that there is no anti-Catholic bias out there in media land; we offered our own examples of it. On occasion, however, when the church is depicted as oppressive, authoritarian, irrelevant, etc., the cause is not bias or ignorance, but good sound reporting; that's the way it sometimes is. As the church has always taught, the church is always peccable.

Agency did its job

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: I am writing in response to the article by John J. Piderit, S.J., "Give Me Shelter: Profits and Code Violations in the Bronx" [April 19]. While I am sympathetic to the author's concern for the ten-

ants in 2645 Morris Avenue, I must correct the impression that conditions at the building could have been improved by "decisive action" on the part of the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD).

Specifically, the article implied that HPD did not act when in fact HPD took appropriate, affirmative action within the constraints of the legal system. The erroneous impression resulted, I believe, from a fundamental misinterpretation of HPD's role in the 7A process, as well as from small, factual inaccuracies that ran throughout the article.

HPD's role in the 7A process is constrained by law, and the ultimate decisions regarding appointments of 7A administrators are made by judges, not by HPD. The appointment of a 7A administrator, after all, essentially removes the property from the possession and control of its owner. It is not a remedy that the courts impose without finding, as the statute requires, "conditions dangerous to life, health, or safety."

HPD's sole role in the process is to recommend appointment of a 7A administrator in those cases where we believe that the court will find that the seriousness of the conditions warrants such action. With a limited staff and a large universe of build-
(Continued on page 491)

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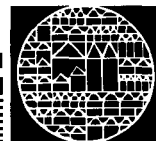
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COMMONWEAL



Clarence Thomas

For someone who cultivates the image of being an utterly reasonable nice guy, George Bush manages to pull off dazzling displays of cynicism. Clarence Thomas's nomination to the Supreme Court is but the latest example. A black judge for the black "chair" vacated by Justice Thurgood Marshall is nominated by a president who has spent the last two years fighting a civil rights bill because he says it has quotas, though it does not. (Does it add too much to the cynicism quotient to say that much of this legislation was made necessary by the Reagan-Bush Supreme Court overturning previous civil rights decisions?)

This is also the George Bush whose presidential campaign played on the intertwined racial and sexual fears of Americans. Yet such is the degraded state of national politics that George Bush, the nice, can't lose. Whether accepted or rejected by the Senate, the Thomas nomination shows that *pace* the Willie Horton ads and the veto of civil rights legislation, George Bush is no bigot, not really. He's—well—just a nice guy. In the unlikely event that Thomas's nomination should go down, Bush can go on to nominate one of the Hispanics on his list to show not only how nice he is, but how dedicated to minority rights as well.

The nomination of Thomas, widely advertised as a black conservative, opposed to affirmative action and dedicated to the bootstrap theory of American achievement, also gives the Democrats another-in-a-lifetime chance to shoot themselves in the foot. Will Thomas pass their abortion litmus test? Will he hold up under "PC" scrutiny for being black and conservative? Will an apparently casual approving remark about natural law invite insinuating questions about Thomas's religious views? Offensive remarks and anecdotes about Thomas seem to have been the first tactics adopted at least by some Democrats. Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder's woolly query about Thomas's allegiance to the pope is as vicious as it is ignorant—Thomas now attends an Episcopal church. Rumors of a confederate flag displayed on his desk when he was an assistant attorney general for the state of Missouri, set off another frenzy of protest. In fact, the Georgia state flag, which includes the Confederate colors, stood on Thomas's desk, according to a colleague, as a symbol of what black school children in Georgia had to face. What is it about our current political culture that allows a man who has felt and resisted the pain of racial bigotry to now be attacked for everything but his race—his childhood religion, his conservatism, his supposed disloyalty to kin and community, and perhaps even his sense of irony?

Of course, there is much about which to question Clarence Thomas. After all, if approved, the forty-three-year-old judge may still be sitting on the court in 2031, forty years from now, long after George Bush has passed from the scene and the Reagan revolution has had its counter-revolution. On potential longevity alone, Thomas's competence and capabilities deserve serious scrutiny. Nor do we mean to suggest

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that his political and ideological propensities are off limits to Senate probing. But there is a big difference between what the Democrats and their allies in prochoice and civil rights groups have pressed so far and what might tell us something about Thomas's abilities to uphold and interpret the Constitution. Admittedly the decisions of the current Court do not inspire the highest standards here. Given what is now known about the nominee, Clarence Thomas seems at least as qualified as the two most recent appointments to the Court; absent a critical misstep during the nomination hearing or damaging new information, he will probably win the consent of the Senate.

Details of Thomas's life exposed over the last several weeks show a man struggling against the tide of bigotry that still pulls against the security and well-being of so many blacks and of this country itself. One of the ironies of his life trajectory, however, is not its singularity but its similarity to that of many Americans. Rather than the embodiment of the pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps myth, Thomas's story more closely follows the pattern by which most Americans have made it in this society: a decent education, hard work, a sense of responsibility—and a series of social systems ready to support such an individual. The national myth overlooks the social system part, whether it is the Catholic sisters who ran the school for black children that Thomas attended and the people and policies that supported their school, or Senator John Danforth of Missouri who acted as mentor to Thomas and, more important, who had a government job to give the young Yale Law School graduate. There is a meritocracy in this country but it does not and could not work on individual merit alone. Connections, formal and informal, count; so does money and so does public policy. Ask George Bush how he got into Yale. And ask Clarence Thomas the same.

Clarence Thomas's story is complex and rich. Yet, he appears to fit an ideological niche in George Bush's plans for the Supreme Court. Can he be more than that? Guido Calabresi, dean of the Yale Law School, clearly not a friend of the current Court or the Bush administration, but a friend of Thomas's, urges his confirmation (*New York Times*, July 28, 1991). "This Court is outrageously homogeneous. It is overwhelmingly made up of gray Republican political hangers-on of virtually identical backgrounds. They all bring to the Court the same life experience and lack thereof." Rather than the "nonentity" that might follow Thomas's defeat, Calabresi urges support of Thomas: "For there is just a chance that such a one may stand up to the pack again, and remind us all of what it is like to be poor and friendless and to be facing a hostile state."

DIAL 119 FOR MURDER

As the special supplement in this issue of *Commonweal* (pp. 465-480) makes clear, active euthanasia is perilously close to achieving legalized status here in the United States. Under Washington state's Initiative 119—on this November's ballot

and presently favored to win approval—physicians would be allowed to consciously end the lives of competent terminal patients who had requested relief from their sufferings. In the process, medical doctors would become state-licensed medical dispatchers. In Leon Kass's unflinching words (p. 475), those traditionally vowed to the art of healing would become "agents of death."

Why is this practice, which threatens to overturn two millennia of axiomatic respect for the inherent value and inviolability of the human person, apparently about to be welcomed within our cultural walls? The reasons are many. An ethos of comfort, coupled with the atomization of the individual in our society and a loss of transcendent spiritual values, has heightened a natural fear of dying and death. And that fear is more and more compounded by another creature of our own making: modern medical technology. Its proficiency is astounding, and its unintended outcomes sometimes alarming.

Take the case of Rudy Linares, a twenty-three-year-old father who tearfully held staff members of a Chicago hospital at bay with a pistol in 1989 as he withdrew life-support systems from his sixteen-month-old son. The boy had spent half his life in irreversible coma. "I'm not here to hurt anyone," Linares told hospital personnel. "I just want to let my son die." Who among us does not fear that we or a loved one may some day be made to suffer a uselessly prolonged (and possibly financially catastrophic) death? Or take the case of Nancy Wallace who signed a petition for placing Initiative 119 on the ballot: "My mother was sentenced to five years on a feeding tube," she told the *New York Times*. "It just wiped me out, spiritually and financially. There's got to be a better way."

Certainly it is not physician-assisted, state-legitimized suicide. Rather, it is the watchful and loving care of the dying by society, and the assurance of their comfort throughout the natural and inevitable process of death. Such care has been practiced for centuries in the Jewish and Christian traditions, among the latter by specific religious orders as well as in families, and its modern manifestation is the hospice movement. Loving care of the dying includes the effective control of pain; emotional and spiritual support; and the judicious withholding and/or withdrawal of extraordinary means of medical treatment when continuing them has become unreasonable or unjustifiable. It is precisely in these latter situations that contemporary medical ethicists and moral theologians must make their most serious efforts to clarify and apply what were the traditional distinctions between ordinary and extraordinary means of treatment. Ronald E. Cranford, M.D., in analyzing our current dilemma, writes: "It is ironic that the two groups most opposed to active euthanasia—the medical profession and the prolife movement—are the ones most responsible for this grassroots movement toward active euthanasia." They will lose the struggle, he believes, "unless they recognize and encourage more acceptable alternatives" ("Active Euthanasia, Religion, and the Public Debate," Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics, 676 N. St. Clair, Chicago, IL 60611, \$10, pp. 124).

Such alternatives are outlined by ethicist Stanley Harakas, writing in the same volume. When the major physical systems

have broken down and there does not seem to be any reasonable expectation they can be restored, extraordinary mechanical devices can be removed. "This action," Harakas says, "should never be confused with euthanasia, which brings to an end, deliberately and consciously, a life which is capable of maintaining itself with normal care. It is one thing to kill and murder; it is quite another thing to 'allow the peaceful separation of soul and body.'"

The challenge of Initiative 119 is not only for physicians and the prolife movement. It is for all members of society. Each human life has an intrinsic value. That realization is the greatest safeguard in promoting the advancement of human rights and the dignity of each one of us. The revolutionary character of Initiative 119 will dismantle that sea wall and leave us exposed to the tides of arbitrary power and mere utility. Though we must all learn to accept the inevitability of death and its wrenching consequences, we must still maintain our hope in the face of them and help others to do so as well. To allow physician-assisted murder would be to alter irrevocably the nature of the physician-patient relationship. Even worse, it would mean the final abandonment of what is most sacred and vulnerable in the human project.

REPORT FROM SOUTH AFRICA

THE TEARS OF KWAZULU

BLOOD ON MANY HANDS

About an hour to the north of Elandsdorp, during the Boer War (1899-1902), the Boers ambushed a British train and captured war correspondent Winston Churchill. About another hour away, in the midst of the "Great Trek" in 1838, Andries Pretorius, with 500 well-armed men and two cannons, killed 3,000 Zulus armed with spears, and didn't lose a man. It was the battle of Blood River—South Africa's sacred moment, proof that God had chosen the Afrikaners to own this land and keep their white blood pure.

My bus rolled smoothly through Montana-like landscape toward Pietermaritzburg, in the province of Natal, about forty miles in from Durban and the Indian Ocean. The area reeks, with its military monuments and Voortrekker museums, of South Africa's white history—a historical prison from which the nation is only beginning to escape. We pass a military convoy. We don't know it, but at the intersection we have just passed, six men have been killed within the last few days in clashes between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom party, the followers of the KwaZulu "homeland" chief, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who that week was on his way to Washington, D.C., to promote himself as a non-Communist alternative to Nelson Mandela's ANC.

I had come to South Africa because it seemed, in its transition

from apartheid to democracy, the politically most interesting place outside of Baghdad. I found a nation doubly obsessed: first with its history, the mythical, theologized treks and nineteenth-century battles which had established its identity; and now with its future—the pariah's new international respectability. In June, as Parliament repealed a series of apartheid laws, each day's paper and TV news brought new boasts: President F.W. deKlerk accepted in one world capital after another; the world-traveling "Holiday on Ice" show opens in Johannesburg; an invitation to a track meet in Kenya; Olympic Games approval looms. South Africa as host to the Olympics in 2004?

In 2004 the white population will be 10 percent. Yet today, choosing carefully—don't go downtown on weekends—you could move around Johannesburg, particularly places like the Eastgate shopping center, and think your world was white. One afternoon I ran three miles through the hills of the Kensington neighborhood—with its beautiful middle-class homes and gardens, middle-class snarling guard dogs, and WARNING security signs on their ten-foot walls—and stopped to watch a field hockey game at the renowned Jeppe public high school. With all the boys so white, blond, and fresh-faced, handsome in their bright uniforms and blazers, I could have been in England—or rather on the set of a British movie based on some E.M. Forster or D.H. Lawrence story.

Yet, twenty-four hours later I stood on a hillside in KwaZulu, 450 kilometres south, looking into the charred remnants of a hut where two young women had been murdered in a tribal war that, nationwide, for the last three years has killed an average of nine people a day.

It is this civil war's tragic paradox that the Zulu people—by nature and history so gentle, hospitable, often Christian, almost saintly in their forbearance—seem to have reached for their redefinition back to the 1820s, to those twelve years when the monster, warrior king Shaka, famed for his splendid physique, transformed the Zulu kingdom into a militarized state, which degenerated into a reign of terror. Their resurgence, first as a tribal force, now under the auspices of the Inkatha Freedom party, corresponds with the birth pains of a "new," postapartheid South Africa, which is neither as peaceful as the white liberals who rejoiced at the February 1990 release of Mandela had hoped, nor as "democratic, unitary, and nonracial" as the ANC platform dreamed.

Apartheid, by creating the ten "homelands" (Transkei, Venda, KwaZulu, etc. in a series of laws in 1913, 1951, and 1971) as something like Indian reservations where all blacks, unless licensed to work in cities, were expected to live, used tribalism—or "ethnicity" or "cultural identity"—to isolate blacks and consolidate white minority power. Tribal chiefs, many of them, in the eyes of the ANC, corrupt stooges who played along with the system, became tools of apartheid themselves. So it is no accident that the rise in political violence corresponds with the breaking up of the old order, the rise of Inkatha, and the determination of pro-apartheid die-hards—referred to as a mysterious "Third Force"—that, even if a new constitution is in place by the time of the next national election, Nelson Mandela of the ANC will never sit as president.

At Elandskop, at the hilltop mission on the KwaZulu border, overlooking Pietermaritzburg, Father Chris Chatteris, S.J., forty-two, who was born in northern Rhodesia and came here in 1985, leads me through his four little "kingdoms": a foundation-funded development project which teaches Zulu women nutrition and how to raise vegetables organically; a one-thousand-student grade school and high school where six-year-olds learn English through computer-assisted instruction; four churches spread throughout the hillside settlements; and a clinic with an emergency room and maternity ward which assists 500-700 births a year. Then, with two women leading the way, reciting the rosary and singing as we go, for two hours we make the rounds up and down the dirt roads of the Zulu settlements, to bring Communion to the sick and old.

On a typical circular, mud-brick hut, called a rondavel, a cattle skull hovers over the door, and a rubber tire—which Zulus believe wards off lightning—encircles the thatch roof's peak. Inside, in the center of a hard dirt floor, a wood fire burns continually, cutting the winter cold and warming water for tea. The smoke stings our eyes. A boy sets a tiny table for the Eucharist and places stools for the two priests. Across the room an old woman and five or six neighbor women—all very heavy and wrapped in colorful sweaters and robes—kneel or sit and sing as Chris reads the prayers in Zulu. A goat looks in the door. As we leave, Chris introduces me as a priest-journalist from America; he wants his parishioners to understand that the outside world is interested in them.

On the hillside I inspect the murder scene where two sisters were shotgunned in their beds by Inkatha warriors. One, pregnant, was shot and set on fire; the other collapsed over her four-year-old son, pinning him, and soaking him with her blood until Father Tim Smith, S.J., arrived to discover her corpse and rescue the child.

In the previous week approximately ninety Zulus had died in a series of retaliatory murders as men and boys carrying spears, shields, and guns ran and drove hysterically from one burning village to another in search of enemies—some of whom they had prayed with at Sunday Mass.

Chris has doubled as novice master—though there are no novices at the moment—and pastor since April 1990, when Tim, threatened with death because he dared to intervene in the killings, had to leave.

Smith's account of his tenure at Elandskop (1983-90), in the novitiate's diaries and a memoir, is a microcosm of what was happening to the whole country. Members of the same parish, many of them teen-agers, killed one another in a turf war between the United Democratic Front (UDF), ANC allies, and Inkatha, who, beginning in 1987, promoted a join-us-or-else policy. People joined UDF or Inkatha, Smith wrote, in order to survive. At first the people openly condemned those responsible for the killings, but soon fear took over, and they lapsed into abstraction and condemned "the violence"—with a shake of the head and a sigh.

In the Natal the conditions that foster violence—poverty, landlessness, unemployment—are at their worst. And there's blood on a lot of hands. But there seems to be more blood on Inkatha's.

Commonweal will resume its normal publication schedule beginning with the next issue, to be dated September 13th.

A 1989 study documented that sixteen of twenty-nine Natal violent incidents were Inkatha-initiated, three UDF; and Smith records that many of the youths enlisted by the police as "constables" were in fact Inkatha thugs. This June the weekly *New Nation* published the confessions of a white, former South African Defense Force chief who recruited and trained homeland youths (without Buthelezi's knowledge, he said) to foment black-on-black violence and thus demonstrate that blacks, specifically the ANC, were not fit to govern. The widely respected *Weekly Mail* in early June lambasted Buthelezi, who retained as his cabinet minister Samuel Jamile, a convicted murderer, and took no action against disappeared members of his own police force indicted in a series of killings. At the end of June the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* published a photo of Inkatha supporters toting G3 automatic rifles issued by KwaZulu police.

From Chris's hilltop he can see both the lush, white-owned farmlands and the eroded landscape of the blacks—"a world of mud and cow-dung, of flies and rusting corrugated-iron pit latrines, of scrawny, furtive dogs" where "each homestead houses an average of ten people, most of them children." It is the third world—wondering how it will fit into the "new" South Africa which, free of sanctions and warming up for the Olympics, will have less incentive to either educate its black poor or redistribute the land (87 percent in white hands) stolen over a century.

The National party's new educational reform would mandate universal schooling through the first seven grades, but since South Africa has no separate-but-equal case history, it will be a long while before we see black faces on the soccer fields of Jeppe High School.

Chris cautions against what he calls the "Idi Amin Syndrome"—by which he means that white liberals are too slow to realize that blacks can be as bad as whites. Thus it would be a mistake to romanticize Mandela or back the ANC uncritically. Some days Chris fears a civil war prolonged by the alliance of the heavily armed black and white right wings. Other days he sees that the urban-based ANC, according to the polls, really does have broad support and should win a post-apartheid, post-new democratic constitution election with over 50 percent of the vote, with the white-colored-Indian National party second, and Inkatha a poor third. Since my visit, the July ANC convention, which reinforced Mandela's pre-eminence while bringing a cadre of well-organized, competent pragmatists (some of them Communists)—those who held the ANC together while Mandela was in prison—into second-level positions, is evidence that the ANC is making the transition from an underground revolutionary movement to a political party.

As my Johannesburg-bound bus pulled out of Pietermaritzburg, the army's armored personnel carriers unloaded troops in the center of town. They were most likely on hand to control the expected weekend demonstrations celebrating Soweto Sunday, the fifteenth anniversary of the slaughter of the student protesters

whose refusal to be taught in the Afrikaans language unleashed the final phase of the black revolution.

That day's *Natal Witness* (June 15) turned its attention to the report that philanthropists had rescued from oblivion the manuscripts of Pietermaritzburg-born novelist Alan Paton, whose *Cry the Beloved Country* was "the opening salvo in the literary attack on apartheid," and were returning them to South Africa. "There is no need any more for protest literature," the *Witness* editorialized; the Alan Patons of the future "will have to find new causes and controversies."

The way things are going, they won't have far to look.

RAYMOND A. SCHROTH

Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., journalism professor at Loyola University in New Orleans, is author, with Jeff Theilman, of Volunteer: With the Poor in Peru (Paulist).

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

'I'LL BE RIGHT BACK'

REINCARNATION REVIVED

The cemetery at the monastery needs a major manicure. Several tombstones are tilting. The epitaph on one marker caught my eye: "I'll be right back! Father Peregrine—d. March 31, 1915." There was the first spark—a hint of reincarnation?—in a day that would singe the catechism.

I had arrived early for a "Whither Christianity?" symposium, a provocative theme to be presented by a languishing religious community of priests and brothers belatedly making gestures toward survival. Brother Dolce, all effervescence, gave me a booming greeting: "Hello, Comrade!" I let it pass.

At the orientation meeting in the Great Hall, dozens of veteran symposia attendees, members of church staffs and parish committees, gathered, each equipped with the necessities of pastoral life—notebook, name tag, coffee cup, and furrowed brow. Most had looked at too many screens—computer, television, confessional—in search of Godot. Few had ever composed a sonnet, voted for a socialist, bet a Daily Double, or winked at a stranger.

After we trudged through four verses of "Amazing Grace," the keynote speaker, an underemployed master of novices, intoned the mandated cliché: pleased and privileged to be with us. He described the kind of Catholicism that prevailed in the years before Vatican II. He brought to our attention and lamented the fading of several ancient Catholic beliefs and practices: indulgences, purgatory, the devil, holy days of obligation, tithing, the sinfulness of birth control, papal infallibility, fasting and abstinence. He sniffed and shuddered. He further commented on a few traditional Catholic beliefs and practices that are, he hinted, now in the process of fading: three persons in one God, Original Sin, chastity, hell, confessions, the priesthood, and the permanence of marriage. These treasures, he mourned, are dis-

appearing, not by direct resistance, but by the quiet inattention of faithful Catholics.

The eyes of participants were popping, but no objections were raised. Another monk, the author of several unpublished novels, came to the podium and gave us the heartening news. Several refreshing religious beliefs, he declared, are coming on strong: the infinite power of love, the nobility of every human person, universal salvation, the glorious goodness of all creation, the supremacy of conscience, reincarnation, and respect for the rightful roles of women in our society and church. Our speaker suggested that our more enlightened attitudes in these areas have recently helped to reduce the incidence of at least three ugly experiences in our society: abortions, the casual use of drugs, and street crimes in several large cities. He gave no statistics on these developments.

At the first pause in the program, members of our group stampeded to recharge their psyches with caffeine.

Then the resident theologian, Vaticanized a generation ago, reflected on eternal verities and alluded to an evolving problem. In the church of our childhood, he said, we believed that every person is created to praise God eternally and that, when the body dies, the soul of that person goes promptly to be judged by a God both merciful and just. Every good person will be rewarded, every wrongdoer punished. At this judgment, a person will be directed to heavenly glory or a place of temporary purification or hellish torture.

This has been our understanding of eventual religious experiences, our guru at the podium explained, until recent developments in religious doctrine have brought a more enlightened understanding of the Christian message.

An awkward question has surfaced and our speaker took it on with aplomb. Heaven is a glorious reward for saints, the blessed, the pure of heart, people who sought and followed an enlightened conscience—for all authentic lovers. If there is a hell, it is empty; it is not mentioned by contemporary theologians. The plan of God for all persons to gain salvation will be fulfilled. Purgatory has been a Catholic fantasy without a biblical foundation, now forgotten. The question: If only purified lovers can enter into eternal union with a God of love in heaven, where goes the person who has not yet achieved his or her designated degree of love? Maybe, just maybe, that person, after death, will get another opportunity, another chapter of life on earth, to be converted from sin and selfishness to a love that grants admittance into heaven.

This is called reincarnation, the reentrance of a person's tarnished soul into another human body for another opportunity or several opportunities to become prepared for God's blessed reward. Each incarnation provides an occasion for a person to grow in love. Our conference master suggested another pilgrimage on earth could be a blessing for many of us. Of course, there is no scientific evidence that the reincarnation theory is true. Nor is there any proof that it is false. It is a hopeful hypothesis, believed by millions of religious persons in the past and today.

A professor of Scripture, short of stature and breath, made only a brief stop at our meeting and a brief comment on the theme. He reminded us that many persons thought Jesus was a

reincarnation of Elias or Jeremiah. Jesus also said a person must be "born again" before entering into heaven. The apostles wondered if a man born blind was afflicted because of his sins in a former life; their question implied a belief in reincarnation. And the Book of Revelation (21:27) gives the clear message: "Nothing defiled shall enter heaven." Without a hell or a purgatory, where does the defiled person go?

Lunch break: not many participants knew the words for the praying of the noon Angelus or had ready responses to the morning's dilemmas.

After a plate of sauerbraten and a slice of strudel, the local historian opened a few eyes. A belief in reincarnation, he explained, was widely debated in the early centuries of the Christian era. Saint Gregory of Nyssa was one of its eloquent advocates: "It is absolutely necessary that a person's soul must be purified and, if this does not take place during this life, it must be accomplished in future lives." Saint Augustine, hardly a theological rebel, asked God: "Was I in another body?" Then, at the Second Council of Constantinople in A.D. 553, a splinter group of Eastern bishops without a pope was maneuvered by the Emperor Justinian, a frustrated theologian, to reject reincarnation as an authentic Christian belief. The church vs. state tug-of-war brought down the curtain on this theological discussion. Through fourteen centuries the subject has not been seriously considered by any mainline Christian church, though it is widely accepted by most religions in the East. Today, some contemporary Christians are looking to non-Christian religions to consider their teachings, believing the human family will eventually embrace a single worldwide religion. Some Christians are pausing to reflect. Some religious visions may be enlarged.

To this historical overview was appended the names of heroines and heroes of the human family who have believed in reincarnation—William Blake, William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman,

Johann Goethe, Feodor Dostoevski, Robert Browning, Leo Tolstoy, Charles Darwin, Henry Thoreau, Conan Doyle, William James, George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce, Aldous Huxley, Pearl Buck, Thomas Wolfe, Jack London, Herman Hesse, Robert Frost, John Masefield, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Ernesto Cardenal.

Most cautious Christians consider reincarnation the bizarre belief of religious weirdoes. Yet a message from the East is being whispered in the West. Several surveys report that nearly 22 percent of U.S. adults believe in some form of reincarnation. The theme is currently prominent in several novels and movies. Hans Küng recently noted: "The question of reincarnation is open to discussion."

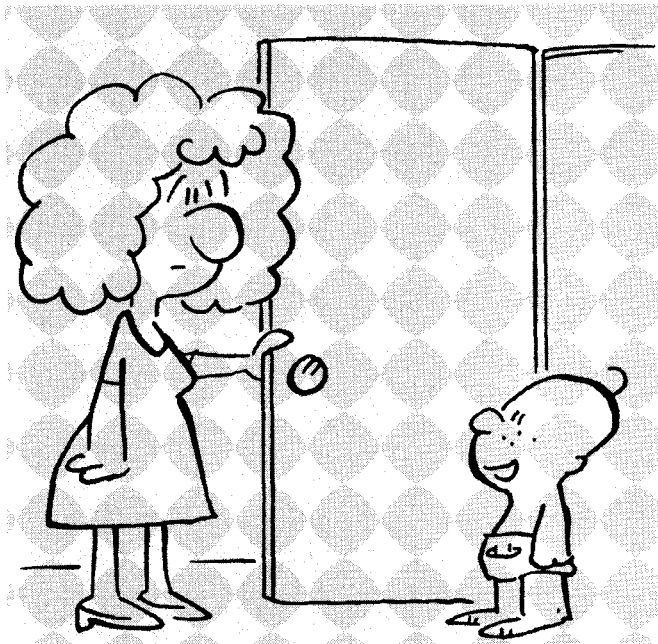
In midafternoon, the theme was opened for questions and comments by participants in the symposium. A few persons mentioned messages found in their tea leaves, and several others added significant observations. We were reminded that Dante's pilgrim went to the Gate of Paradise and then, not totally purified, hesitated. Child prodigies were mentioned; were their extraordinary skills, talents, and insights carried over from a former life? Pilgrims on earth, it was suggested, are a bit like players in a drama. Many rehearsals are necessary before a theatrical role can be perfectly mastered.

A dreamy parish council member assured us that, on several turns of a merry-go-round, he has had several lives and, when he achieves his unique kind of love, he will grab the brass ring and receive his prize. He hummed "All My Life's a Circle." Another committee member recalled one of Saul Bellow's characters who said: "A single span of life can only make virtue desperate. Better none than only one."

A concerned questioner noted that some persons probably would not want another life on earth. Our speaker suggested that resistance could be interpreted as an ardent desire for heaven or an intense dislike for this world. The Bhagavad-Gita was quoted: "As a person casts off worn-out clothes and takes on new ones, so do the souls of persons cast off worn-out bodies and enter new ones."

A new-age member of our group wondered if a person might be reincarnated on another planet. Our guru's response was brief: "Maybe." Our group's response was briefer: "Wow!" A specific question arose: "Do you think Jean Harlow has been reincarnated and is now Madonna?" Our monk replied: "I remember Jean Harlow but who is Madonna?" All those present seemed to agree that since the material of the human anatomy constantly comes and goes yet an individual remains the same person, every adult person on earth has inhabited several different bodies. Therefore, another chapter of a person's life in another human body on earth will not be a totally new experience.

At the community happy hour which has replaced vespers, members of our group, now breathing easier, lifted a few goblets and visited informally. A parish administrator who was inclined to call 911 at noon calmed down enough to reveal his hope to become a deacon—if he can get his wife's permission. A catechist said that she had not been so inspired since her pilgrimage to Medjugorje. A secretary indicated her hope to become acquainted with Matthew Fox and his creation-centered friends.



"It's me, Helen, your husband Steve, I've been born again!"

Most of us, slightly bewildered, staggered back to our parishes, wondering how to put together the scattered theological pieces. I wondered if Father Peregrine had indeed come back for another trip or two. His epitaph encouraged me to concentrate more earnestly on current opportunities to grow in love so that I will

be fully prepared for entrance into glory at the first call. Or at my next call.

HARVEY F. EGAN

Harvey F. Egan, pastor emeritus of St. Joan of Arc Church in Minneapolis, is the author of Leaven: Cantic for a Changing Parish (North Star Press).

OF SEVERAL MINDS John Garvey

POLITICS & CULTURE

TO EACH ITS OWN

We seem deluged, lately, with stories about “PC,” about being “politically correct,” and the ways this concern has taken over campuses, grade school curricula, and even Supreme Court appointments. This may in part be due to something that happens with the press, especially during the summer—the need to grab at something hanging dimly in the air and make a trend of it.

There is a new degree of nastiness in race relations, a new separatism, but it isn’t all that different from the old kind. There are attempts at curriculum reform which indeed look foolish, and while they aim at instilling pride in children from minority ethnic backgrounds, they will instill, instead, bad history.

One thing concerns me here. That is the fact that we are wrong-headed enough to want a version of history in which whole groups were good, and whole other groups were bad. This keeps Serbs and Croats hating each other, and that fact ought to be apparent even to our most brain-damaged educators, but no one seems to notice that the problem stems from a primordial need to have good guys (and therefore bad guys). The need is important to demagogues, but should be anathema to educators. We seem to want to trade one stupid myth for another. We want to replace a vision of America as a nation of heroic white Protestants fleeing persecution in Europe, who “discovered” an inhabited continent, helped to civilize its inhabitants—making some mistakes along the way—and struggled through a problem with slavery which was

finally solved by white people, after some more mistakes. We want to put in place of this a picture of noble “people of color” (don’t call them colored, or examine the fact that this makes white people transparent) whose high culture was torn from them by evil white slavers, and who were rescued solely through their own determined struggle toward freedom.

I think we will have a healthier society when we can show our children both heroes and complications, and tell them that the heroes themselves were complicated. We should be able to tell the truth: white Christians, for reasons of greed, bought black animists as slaves from black Muslims who bought and sold people with as little remorse as their white customers. These victims were brought against their will to a land already populated by tribes, some of whom were peaceful, others vicious, few at all decent to the women among them. American expansion happened for reasons that involved a mushrooming greed; our revolution was perhaps the least defensible use of violence in world history, in that we weren’t really oppressed—we were overtaxed by a too-remote government, and were finally willing to kill for it.

And at the same time, we produced geniuses like Madison, whose approach to writing the Constitution that became the foundation of our government is probably the most enduring and fascinating product of the Enlightenment, one with effects that continue to inspire people in every corner of the world. We produced complicated heroes like Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth

(who forced some slave women into freedom at gunpoint rather than allow them to make the choice of slavery for their own children), and the revolutionary-era Quaker saint John Woolman who opposed both the violence of slavery and the violence of the revolution. It’s all at least as good as Homer, but it is complicated. It isn’t easy to teach, but teaching isn’t—shouldn’t be—easy.

The main concern of educators should not be to make African-American or Irish-American or Italian-American children proud of their culture. That’s their parents’ job. This is, once more, a case of public schools being asked to do what a larger culture, or network of subcultures, has failed to do. But that cultural failure should not lead schools to try to fill in the blank, as if a school room could do what home, church, and neighborhood cannot. Self-esteem ought to be at the bottom of any educational curriculum, and literacy (narrowly defined) at the top. I live in a part of New York where Japanese who have moved to America for several years, for business reasons, send their children to Japanese schools. This is not, as some have suggested, simply a matter of the Japanese wanting to keep their own cultural values isolate and intact, though those values are definitely part of this movement. The main point is that they want their kids literate when they go back home, and they are right to doubt that American schools are capable of doing the job.

The flurry over what is and is not politically correct occurs at the same time as a raw and ugly fact: race relations are once again openly nasty, after years of a kind of forced politeness, punctuated by confrontations in which nobody listened to anybody else. I think it can be argued that the sort of heat generated by the nomination of Clarence Thomas is in its oddly skewed way a sign of health: here a black conservative is being called “treasonous” by black liberals with a stake in one corner of the current system; Thomas has staked

a claim and a career somewhere else. I don't like the company he has kept, but that doesn't matter. (As for the idea that Bush may have instituted a "black seat" on the Court, that's hardly new. There was a Jewish seat on the Court for years, as well as a Catholic seat.) Thomas's career is a challenge to racists, though not the kind of challenge the civil rights movement has traditionally mounted. That divergence is itself not a bad thing.

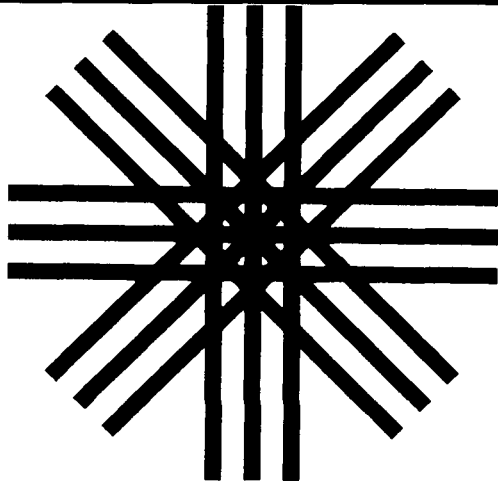
A number of black intellectuals, not all of them conservatives, have openly ques-

tioned the ways in which the continued pursuit of "victim-status" hurts blacks. Writers as different from one another as Julius Lester, Shelby Steele, and Thomas Sowell have made it clear that there is no one black voice, no one black point of view. It is demeaning to think that there should be. There is something profoundly ugly about the pressure that has been brought to bear against Lester, a convert to Judaism and University of Massachusetts (Amherst) professor who has refused to toe a party line on Israel and has been openly critical of

black anti-Semitism. Those who deny that "political correctness" is a problem on campus should review Lester's case—but the fact that he faced the pressure a couple of years before the current journalistic attention to the phenomenon proves that the PC thing really is a faddish attentiveness to a persistent problem, and not at all new.

Not long ago someone lamented the fact that no one now speaks for black Americans the way Martin Luther King, Jr., did. This ought to be celebrated. (Who speaks for Irish Americans? Teddy Kennedy? Ed McMahon?) The problems facing the poorest black Americans are indeed horrible—but there is a generation of black thinkers who have begun to address them, and to urge on the rest of us the understanding that this is not a black problem but a national one. Blacks don't need a single surrogate. They are a complex and interesting set of voices addressing a complicated society, and the problems we face collectively involve not only political agendas, but cultural depths no political agenda can begin to plumb. The point is that we have moved beyond the level of problems that can be met with the narrowly coercive forces politics can bring to bear.

We have moved beyond the sixties in an important and scary way. The problems that had to be faced then were primarily political: a war that was tearing the country apart, the establishment of voting rights and equality of opportunity for people who had been denied them for years. Now political remedies are less obvious, and it is in fact not at all obvious that any political action, within or outside of the system, can move us into a significantly better place, as *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Voting Rights Act, and the antiwar movement did. Some of the most difficult passages we will face as a society over the next several years will involve something no one has yet dealt with in any depth: politics simply can't do the work of culture. Morality (contrary to the views of those conservatives who opposed civil rights legislation or those liberals who defend the rights of child pornographers) can be legislated, with varying degrees of success. The common will to deal with cultural problems really can't be, and it is in this messy area that our greatest problems lie.



THE GRAYMOOR PRIZE

The Friars of the Atonement announce the second annual Graymoor Prize, to be awarded to the best essay on any aspect of ecumenical or interreligious affairs. The prize is intended to encourage and support new ecumenical and interreligious ideas and perspectives. The award-winning submission, which may take the form of a scholarly or critical essay or a personal narrative, should appeal to the interests of the general educated reader.

Original and unpublished essays of approximately 2500-4000 words should be submitted to the editors of *COMMONWEAL* who will make the final decision following consultation with a panel of experts. The winning essay will receive a prize of \$1,000 and will be published in *COMMONWEAL*. The editors reserve the right not to award the prize.

Deadline: October 1, 1991. Announcement of Prize: December 15, 1991. The prize-winning essay will be published in *COMMONWEAL*'s January 17, 1992 issue. This essay will become the property of the Graymoor Ecumenical Institute. All other essays will be returned to their authors after January 1.

COMMONWEAL 15 Dutch Street New York, New York 10038

MY FIRST PILGRIMAGE

ON THE ROAD TO CZESTOCHOWA

EWA BERBERYUSZ

Some time in the spring of 1980 a hole was dug under Jasna Gora. It was dug secretly, in the darkness of night. Mining crews trucked in from Silesia accomplished the task swiftly and professionally. Next morning the people of Czestochowa, to their chagrin, found the hole, framed with fresh yellow soil, at the end of the Avenue of Our Lady.

The authorities' idea was as transparent as it was cunning: Faced with an avalanche of pilgrimages from Warsaw and other parts of Poland, the Communists designed this "passage" as a control point to check the flow of pilgrims and detain them as deemed necessary.

Pilgrimages to Czestochowa had been harassed from the first days of Poland's "people's" government. In the Stalinist days, the routine was to allow or deny permission at the last moment before the pilgrimage. Many pilgrims walked to Czestochowa "illegally," risking physical repression.

Under Khrushchev, more refined methods were used to deal with religion. Systematic attempts were made to sabotage pilgrimages from the inside: disguising themselves as pilgrims, secret police agents staged drunken brawls, set fires, bellowed obscene songs as the pilgrims passed through villages. The Communists' objective, of course, was to discredit the pilgrimages in the eyes of the rural population. The hole under Jasna Gora was a chip off the same political block.

Stefan Barela, then bishop of Czestochowa, decided to do something about the ploy. He leaked information about the hole to Radio Free Europe, which broadcast it to Poland. A storm of protest broke loose around the country. The government's attempts to lie its way out of the predicament only added fuel to the fire.

The editor of the Warsaw weekly *Kultura*, where I worked at the time, sent me to Czestochowa to cover a press conference called by the press department of the Communist party's central committee, to offer a "local perspective" on the affair. They put us up at Hotel Patria, Czestochowa's best, where we were wined and dined royally while the stores around town offered empty

shelves. We were taken to the hole where we heard diatribes about the wonders of this "unique urban design." Not a word was said about the hole's real purpose and our questions were answered vaguely amid assurances that the party "does not want a conflict with the church." As indeed it did not, at least not an open conflict, given the temperature of the public mood. "Operation Hole" was officially proclaimed an "error."

Before returning home, I was strongly tempted to visit Bishop Barela and learn "the rest of the story" but, frankly, I was afraid he wouldn't see me—after all, I worked for a government weekly, even though party insiders liked to call it a "nest of opposition" which, indeed, it was. But after decades of the Communist war against the church, even our minds were conditioned to ignore religion as part of the nation's life. Just the same, I decided to participate in the next pilgrimage. And so I did.

While marching, there were group discussions on the subject, "Why am I a pilgrim?" When I took the microphone and explained my not-quite-religious motives, my group's initial response was stony silence. But then, slowly, they accepted me and I began to discover a Poland I never knew, and her vast commonwealth of faith newly imbued with the spirit of Vatican II. When the Communists struck Poland with their martial law in 1981 and the nation stampeded to seek refuge under the wings of the church, the spiritual ground for change was ready.



"I thought I was through with waiting on lines forever and ever!"

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But even then it didn't occur to me to try to cover "my" pilgrimage in *Kultura*.

The very first pilgrimage from Warsaw to Czestochowa was led by the Paulines in 1711. Ours set out on its way exactly 269 years later. Months before, there were lines at registration desks in St. Ann's Church adorned with a banner proclaiming: "Poland's Students March to Czestochowa." Below, someone added: "Atheists included." After paying the 200 zloty participation fee, we were issued badges identifying us as participants in "The 269th Warsaw Walking Pilgrimage to Jasna Gora." We also received a pilgrim's guidebook: No alcohol, no smoking, no shorts, no rolled-up sleeves, no campfires. No mixed tents or other sleeping quarters. A pilgrimage is not a cross-country hike. No "sirs" or "madams"; we address each other as "brother" and "sister," or by first names. We are entitled to two mugs of black coffee a day and a bowl of soup every other day. Beyond that, bring your own food and beverages. We are encouraged to take a good supply of thick socks, boots, and Band-Aids. And finally: Let's try to forget about ourselves and try to serve others, especially those we don't know or like. Signed: Brother Guide.

How many of us are walking? We don't know for sure, but certainly not less than 100,000. We are organized into groups, each of which is led by someone carrying the Cross on a long pole, followed by pilgrims carrying loudspeakers and microphones. A continuous confession is taking place at the rear of each group, heard by priests wearing cassocks and stoles, often carrying plastic bags with a tomato, an apple, a thermos bottle.

Every time a stop is announced, people drop to the ground, many out of breath; our average daily distance is 30 kilometers or 245 km in almost nine days. But when we approach a town en route and the bells of the local church begin to peal to greet us, our backs straighten up and our voices gain in strength as we march, singing, with our flags, our sick and handicapped, our knapsacks, and our children (the youngest pilgrim is four months old).

As we stop at the church, crowds gather in the street, waving, applauding, singing. Someone pulls out a hose from a nearby yard, sprinkles heat-exhausted pilgrims with cool water. Someone brings buckets of cold fruit compote. Our Cross enters the church momentarily, the rest of us sit on warm asphalt. Some locals are doing a brisk business; single-use plastic raincoats, normally available at 40 zlotys, are selling for 140. "Ice cream! Fresh vanilla ice cream..." A pretty young nun bites noisily into an apple, chews on it with relish, and then intones in a steely voice: "Queen of Poland, clear the way for us..." The sun has moved to the other horizon. We are on our way again.

The Italians and Germans dominate among the foreign pilgrims. The first row of the French group wears the word "France" on the front of their shirts. Crowds of Poles shout, "Long live France!" The people of Warsaw cried the same words on September 3, 1939. I remember vividly that spontaneous demonstration on the streets of Warsaw as I rode in a horse-pulled cab with my father, already in uniform, on his way to war.

Crowds on the sidewalks thicken as we move across town,

there's more cheering and arm-waving. People pour out onto the street from homes, buildings, stores. Our Italians jump out of the column, hug the bystanders, call joyously, "*Madonna nera! Madonna nera!*" The crowd breaks into a song to the tune of an old Negro spiritual: "Full of Power, Grace, and Glory..." The Italians pitch in: "*Pleni di forza, di grazia, di gloria*"—their singing, naturally, much more melodious than ours.

The formula, the vitality of this street worship is borrowed from American black culture. So is the breathtaking bravura of spiritual optimism and sheer joy in God, so new to this part of the world: "...I've got a palace, far over the mountain, in the land where love never dies." Or: "I'm gonna be there when the Lord is back." Or: "Like a river, God's love flows through my soul." Love is the theme in all these songs, hauntingly, incessantly, obsessively. Perhaps the Communist mayor of Czestochowa hit upon something when he said, half-disdainfully, half-enviously: "They march like stormtroopers and they sing erotica."

Our first "sleeping quarters" is a farmyard sparsely covered with hay. The extremes of human nature become immediately visible: some of us, the wimps, curl up under our blankets and look frightened in the face of all this wilderness. Others, the John Waynes, are all over the place comforting the fearful and producing—miraculously—such luxuries as hot water, coffee, even cherry soup with dumplings!

Next morning, en route, we have a conference on the causes

John Cavadini In August on Atlantic Street

In August on Atlantic Street
The houses bob like boats
Moored out in the sun
And cicadas singing cast
Their sound in skeins
Across the ponds of air to
Trees the other side.
The ground, ripened, dried, and
Milled into a satisfying
Dust, seems nourishing,
A solemn sacrament
Indifferently dispensed
Now to wasps milling over
Spoiled grapes,
Now to the ermine
Goldenrod standing at the gate,
And now to the strict ascetic
Phlox, emaciated, like the
Perfect Saints who saw the
Hesychastic light, and waited for
Its last, sustaining touch.

of the fall of the Polish kingdom. Brother Andrzej Wielowieyski (a highly respected Catholic writer) discusses two major currents in Poland's history: republican and feudal. The first has a longer tradition in Poland than in France—examples: *neminem cap-tivabimus* rights, citizen status for Jewish settlers, safe haven for non-Catholics persecuted elsewhere, etc. Says Brother Andrzej: "I am quite proud to have had a king who—at the time when the rest of Europe was ruled according to *cuius regio, eius religio*—told his people: 'I shall not be the lord of your consciences.'" The feudal current, on the other hand, stemmed from Poland's attitudes toward the grey, poor masses of settlers, mainly in the Eastern outlands of the kingdom, treated somewhat like a colony. Their pleas for emancipation, for representation in political institutions, for equal treatment, "for aren't we all children of the same mother?" were ignored, or worse, answered with contempt. And, sure enough, there followed enmity, unrest, uprisings, finally Cossack wars which were the first portents of disintegration.

The third day of the pilgrimage finds many of us in crisis. Our nurse, a veteran of many marches and an expert in "pilgrim's syndrome," checks our eyes and tongues, sometimes sprays something into our throats. She has some foot balsam and a wonder drug against diarrhea. She punctures blisters on our feet with a needle dipped in alcohol—a ritual that has become as important as prayers, conferences, as the pilgrimage itself.

At Brudzewice, we are caught by a violent thunderstorm. People dash for the two barns designated as our quarters for the night. Nobody pays attention to the signs "Sisters' Barn" and "Brothers' Barn"; torrential rain and a cannonade of lightning flashes bring instant integration. As the storm intensifies, our Italians, frightened, begin to recite a litany—a beautiful, exotic sound, effect heightened by the thunderclaps.

In the morning, a middle-aged woman struggles to her feet from a bed of hay: "I already know what I dislike most in life: the Warsaw Walking Pilgrimage to Czestochowa...." The bright sun bleaches the white garb of the nuns, the white walls of the cloister, and the white walls surrounding it. I vaguely recall a similar scene in an old American movie about World War I.

The Studzianna convent marks the boundary of the God-fearing Opoczyn country. Good folks emerge from the birch woods offering us pierogi, berries, and sour milk. They look guilty accepting our money. An old man in a chair rings a small bell: "Please, brothers and sisters, please, pilgrims, help an old man." A woman gives him a nudge: "You should be ashamed, dad, don't you have enough to live on?" And the old man, in an even thinner voice: "Have mercy on an old man, brothers and sisters...."

The town of Kunowice throws another party for us: bells, flags (even stars and stripes), folk costumes, children in white, bread and salt. The same at Zachorzow where we stop for the night. Our hosts slaughter a pig, heat water, bring huge cans of milk—all for the pilgrims. "You see, it's that we cannot go, so you go for us." They take the mess we leave behind philosophically, as a penance. One farmer complains to me smilingly, without malice: "The biggest problem is the shit behind the hay bundles, out in the field. When we bring the bundles to the barns, shit comes with them."

At Zachorzow, secret police agents shower us with leaflets: "Karol Wojtyla is a disappointment!" Last year, I'm told, the theme was: "Germans shot at your fathers, now you let them march with you!" Someone gets on the horn and calls for a prayer for the spirit of tolerance to descend upon us and the whole church. And then: "Let us pray for our brothers and sisters of other faiths, and for the atheists. Let us pray for those who walk with Jesus and those who don't." And then: "Let us pray for these brothers amidst us who are here in line of duty. Hail Mary...."

Figures in white rush to a young woman lying motionless on the ground. Apparently, she fainted. Someone, in the surrounding crowd says there were two deaths in our pilgrimage. Someone else observes, with cruel realism, that it's "nothing" considering the number of participants.

In Soborzyce, I decide to seek shelter in a local public school. I know my chances are slim: all the state agencies on the pilgrimage's route are under strict orders not to provide shelter, or any other help, to the pilgrims. But I am exhausted, hungry, thirsty, desperate, and wet, and so are my fellow pilgrims. A wonderful surprise: the school principal welcomes us with open arms, calls his friends and colleagues who readily invite our pilgrims to stay with them, and then we spend the night talking, talking, talking....

Again, a cloudburst. We line up for the Holy Communion under a roof of umbrellas. Then a crowd of pilgrims, knapsacks on their backs, storms through the rain into nearby farms looking for a dry place to sleep. Suddenly, we encounter opposition: a farmer denies us passage murmuring something about the damages he suffered last year. There's shouting, crying, begging for help. A pilgrim, exasperated, in a desperate gesture, tosses his bag into the mud, grabs the farmer's lapels and screams, "You Catholic, or not, you son of a bitch?!" An Italian pilgrim, shivering from cold, falls on his knees imploring: "*Amico... amico...!*"

The last leg. We can see Jasna Gora ahead of us. At first sight it looks a bit Byzantine, like Stalin's palace of culture. But then, as we approach, the nobility of its shape gradually becomes clear. The orderlies get busy, organizing us in groups of ten, and the "great wait" begins: we move two steps forward and then stop. All of a sudden, our dirty, sweaty pilgrims undergo a miraculous transformation: fresh shirts, pants, blouses, clean shoes, ties, and jackets mysteriously find their way from the bags and knapsacks. The children are pushed to the fore: clean, festive, chocolate smeared around their smiling mouths. Then come our handicapped in wheelchairs and pushcarts, cheering, joyous, totally unexpectant of miracles. The singing is incessant, pervasive, overwhelming: "Madonna, oh, Black Madonna...."

The gate of Jasna Gora is like the eye of a needle: the head of our column reaches it at 1 P.M., I'll be there, maybe, around 6 P.M. Only to see the Black Madonna's face for a fleeting moment: the face of an old woman tortured with age and suffering, the face that could belong to the grandmother of the child she holds in her arms.

THE VEIL IS HARD TO LIFT

WOMEN'S PLACE IN PAKISTAN

ELLEN D. WARWICK

The first thing I noticed about Pakistan was the presence of crows and the absence of women. After a middle-of-the-night arrival in Islamabad and some catch-up sleep in a hotel, I awakened to the insistent cawing of birds. Pulling open the drapes, I looked down on one of the main streets of the capital city. Men. Men on foot. Men on bicycles. Men on motorcycles. Men in cars, buses, and trucks. It was as though one-half of the human race had disappeared.

Down in the lobby, the situation was no different. Men behind the registration desk, men serving in the coffee shop, men working as "chambermaids." Out on the street I caught glimpses of uniformed school girls waiting at a bus stop and occasionally a woman strolled by accompanied by her husband or another female. The sight of a woman alone was rare.

I have returned to Pakistan four times since that initial visit in 1988, traveling to cities, towns, and villages in each of the four provinces. My first impression has not changed. Benazir Bhutto notwithstanding, women do not play a large part in Pakistan's public life. Not only are they barely visible in positions of power, they are scarcely to be seen in more ordinary circumstances: clerking in a shop, acting as a secretary, or simply walking freely and unaccompanied down a busy street.

Statistics and personal testimony confirm my impressions. According to *Women in the World Atlas* (Simon and Schuster, 1986), females constitute less than 15 percent of the paid work force of Pakistan. Even those with professional jobs face constraints most Western women would find intolerable. A first grade teacher living in Islamabad told me she never went out alone. A driver took her to school each day and her husband always accompanied her to market. An unmarried Pakistani woman working with an international agency in the capital said she could not leave her apartment at night. "I'm a prisoner here once the sun goes down. I don't worry about being attacked so much as I fear harassment. In this society, women should not be out on their own at any time, but particularly not after dark."

Purdah is the usual explanation given for the absence of women in public places. From a root word meaning veil or curtain, it

refers to the custom of secluding women and enforcing certain high standards of female modesty. Some date the practice from the time of the Prophet Mohammed, others claim it did not take hold until the eighth century when a profligate ruling class began to hide their innumerable wives and concubines from public view. In any event, purdah has been a custom in South Asia for at least a thousand years.

Far from being monolithic, purdah practices vary by country, region, class, and even within the lifespan of an individual. Some Pakistanis point out that educated women enjoy greater freedom than females of only a generation ago; others voice concern that a government influenced by religious fundamentalists is allowing hard-won women's rights to erode. What is certain is that the attitudes underlying purdah—ideas about social status, religion, and family life—are deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts and will not easily change.

In *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* (Vanguard Books, Ltd., 1987) Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed discuss some of the anomalies that characterize purdah in their country. They point out that the very definition of what constitutes public space changes with class and geographical location. On farms where their labor is essential for survival, women work openly in the fields, yet in villages the bazaar area remains out of bounds; women enter only if heavily veiled. In cities, the restrictions vary according to the class of the woman and the size of the place itself. In general, the higher the class of the woman, the fewer restrictions she faces. Larger, more cosmopolitan cities such as Islamabad and Lahore have a freer atmosphere than smaller ones in the more conservative regions of Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier Province.

Physical seclusion and its outward sign, the veil, are not necessarily rejected by women. For some, these can be status symbols. Among the very poor the veil can be a sign that the family has become rich enough that its women no longer need to labor in the fields. Working-class women, whose economic situation forces them out of the home, sometimes cover their faces as a sign of gentility. Purdah becomes a substitute for an otherwise unaffordable prestige, the veil coming to represent freedom, a socially acceptable way of going out in public yet remaining hidden.

Often a degree of purdah is accepted by even educated people as part of their culture. An educational administrator—a man who had lived and studied in Europe before his marriage—invited

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my husband and me to his home for dinner. Soon after escorting us into the living room, he opened a door leading to the back part of the house and nodded me in. "You would like to meet the missus?" I proceeded to an inner sitting room where his wife and sisters waited. The four of us had a marvelous visit, swapping stories about marriage customs and family life and somewhat gingerly explaining our respective attitudes about the role of women in society. These were not simple village folk. All three women had received some university training; one was the principal of a girls' school. An hour later, when dinner was ready, I was brought back to the living room to eat at the first serving with the men. I knew that when we finished, the leftovers would be gathered up for the women in the back room.

That experience left me with conflicting emotions. Above all, I felt honored. The very manner in which the husband opened the door suggested that he was attempting to make a Western guest feel at home by allowing her into an otherwise private space. Furthermore, I realized that unlike my husband, I had met the entire family, not just the male half. Yet I couldn't help wonder: Had I been relegated to a back room or privileged to enter an inner sanctum? So much depended on the point of view! And who controlled the access, the husband or the wife and sisters?

Religious belief plays a disputed role in the sequestering of women. One prominent writer, Abul A'la Maududi, claims that purdah not only stands for some of the most important parts of the Islamic way of life, but that its commands come from the Qur'an itself. Others, like the late Islamic scholar Fazlur Rahmam, believe that the Qur'an advocates neither veil nor segregation of the sexes, but rather insists on sexual modesty. The "Report of the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women" (1989) stated that exploitation and discrimination against women "have nothing to do with Islam" and are "clearly contrary to Quranic injunctions." The report, prepared during General Mohammed Zia Ul-Huq's Islamization program, rested its case for equality on the Qur'an. Yet, as any student of the Bible knows, general principles do not make clear what course of action should be followed in particular instances. The protests by the religious Right over Benazir Bhutto's prime ministership suggest that what equality means in practice remains very much open to debate.

Undoubtedly, religion affects the outlook of Pakistani women when venturing out into the larger world. Hanna Papanek, a social scientist, wrote a moving account of an older woman's remembrances of that fateful event. Married to a civil servant at a young age, the woman found herself at a dinner party where men were present. She sat with her eyes down, overwhelmed: "I felt I was without faith, I had sinned. I had gone in front of so many men, all these friends of my husband....My purdah was broken, my purdah that was my faith." Whatever its current manifestations—seclusion, veiling, sexual segregation at school or work, rigidly defined gender roles—purdah practices spring from deeply held beliefs.

Religion and custom are often so intertwined, one cannot tell which is exerting influence. During a day of visiting schools in a town in the Northwest Frontier Province, I noticed that female teachers and administrators invariably lowered their eyes and covered the bottom half of their faces whenever we went out on the street. "It is our custom," they explained repeatedly. One woman tried to elaborate. "We cover up to protect ourselves from men and because the Prophet, peace be upon him, told us to. And he should know what men are like. He was a man himself." I tried to discern some underlying irony in her comment, but there was none, only simple acceptance.

Most of the Pakistanis I meet are middle class. Most know that gender equality is an issue in the United States and realize that by American standards their country would be found wanting. They are quick to point out that a substantial percentage of Pakistani teachers and medical doctors are women. When discussions move beyond that, however, requests for information often elicit defensive replies.

"And how many women teach in your department?" I asked a U.S.-educated professor after she had described her classes at the Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad. She began to answer in a straightforward fashion, but soon became openly irritated. Most women were too busy to be out working, she snapped. They were home taking care of their children as they should be. And what about wife-beating, rape, and child pornography in the U.S., what had I to say about that? Her message was clear. While I might be perturbed by what I viewed as repression in Pakistani culture, she was every bit as critical of what she deemed license in the United States.

Her answer referred to a theme that surfaced repeatedly: Pakistanis' fear that to concede on issues of feminine equality would be to lose an important part of their cultural identity, particularly family solidarity. Worse—and this fear was more often implied than articulated—adopting a more open definition of women's roles would lead inevitably to the sort of corrupt society that we in the affluent West "enjoy." Fazlur Rahman wrote candidly of this attitude: "But it must be admitted that for most Muslims the contemporary West—with its increasingly broken homes, abused children, and general socio-moral lawlessness



of which sexual chaos is a component—hardly offers a model to be followed.”

The idea that we in the U.S. neglect our families is especially prevalent. “Tell me,” asked an acquaintance, “and please, I mean no disrespect. But is it true that in your country people put their elderly parents in institutions rather than take care of them?” A teen-age boy said he was glad he was not American since boys in the U.S. had to leave home when they were eighteen. A group of women were delighted when I passed around snapshots of my children. “See!” one exclaimed. “These Britishers love their children even as we do!” (She may have been confused about my nationality, but her surprise at my maternal feelings was unmistakable.)

Coupled with their strong commitment to family life, Pakistanis believe that daughters need constant supervision and protection, especially at the onset of puberty. It is striking to visit a town and see very little girls playing freely, then realize that no older ones are in evidence. Since virtually all of Pakistani marriages are arranged, and since a young woman’s reputation affects the selection of a partner, purdah becomes a type of social insurance.

Among those who make up the bulk of Pakistan’s people, the rural poor, this protective attitude can have marked consequences for education. Recent statistics reveal that over 55 percent of boys in the appropriate age group are enrolled in primary school compared to 32 percent of the girls. Enrollments for both sexes fall dramatically after the first few years, but the dropout rate is especially high for girls. Twice as many boys as girls finish elementary school. The literacy rate for females hovers somewhere around 15 percent. The parents making the decisions regarding schooling do not act irrationally given their circumstances. Sons may indeed interact with a larger world where reading and writing make a difference. Daughters must be shielded so they can enter into good marriages and become good wives and mothers.

The condition of school buildings themselves may affect female enrollment. Many structures, especially in rural areas, are ramshackle and dilapidated with little equipment beyond blackboard and chalk. Administrators have reported that some parents were anxious for their daughters to receive schooling but refused to send them to buildings where there were no toilet facilities. They considered the situation an affront to the girls’ modesty.

Even girls from more affluent families are affected by protective attitudes. Again, the problem of arranging a suitable marriage looms large. A female Pakistani professor, educated both at home and in Europe, pointed out that many gifted young women are denied similar opportunities because of the perceived dangers involved. “They are warned they must not even think of attending university, are told to put the idea out of their heads. Their parents worry that a woman educated on a mixed campus will bear a stigma because she has been exposed to male company.” An upper-middle-class father admitted that his daughter wanted to become an engineer but he would not permit her to attend the university that granted that degree. “She would have to live in a hostel [dorm] and women who stay in hostels get a bad reputation. It would make it difficult to arrange a marriage later

on. I’m afraid I’m going to assert my parental prerogatives and insist she become a teacher instead.”

While widely accepted, purdah is not going unchallenged in Pakistan. Various female professional groups and a small but vocal feminist organization called Women’s Action Forum exist. Such groups continue to protest the infamous Hudood Ordinance which punishes women for so-called sexual crimes while letting men go free. Women have fought for and gained a more equitable apportionment of admissions to medical school. And though some commentators claim they are hired because they are more docile than men, increasing numbers of women are working in textile and pharmaceutical factories.

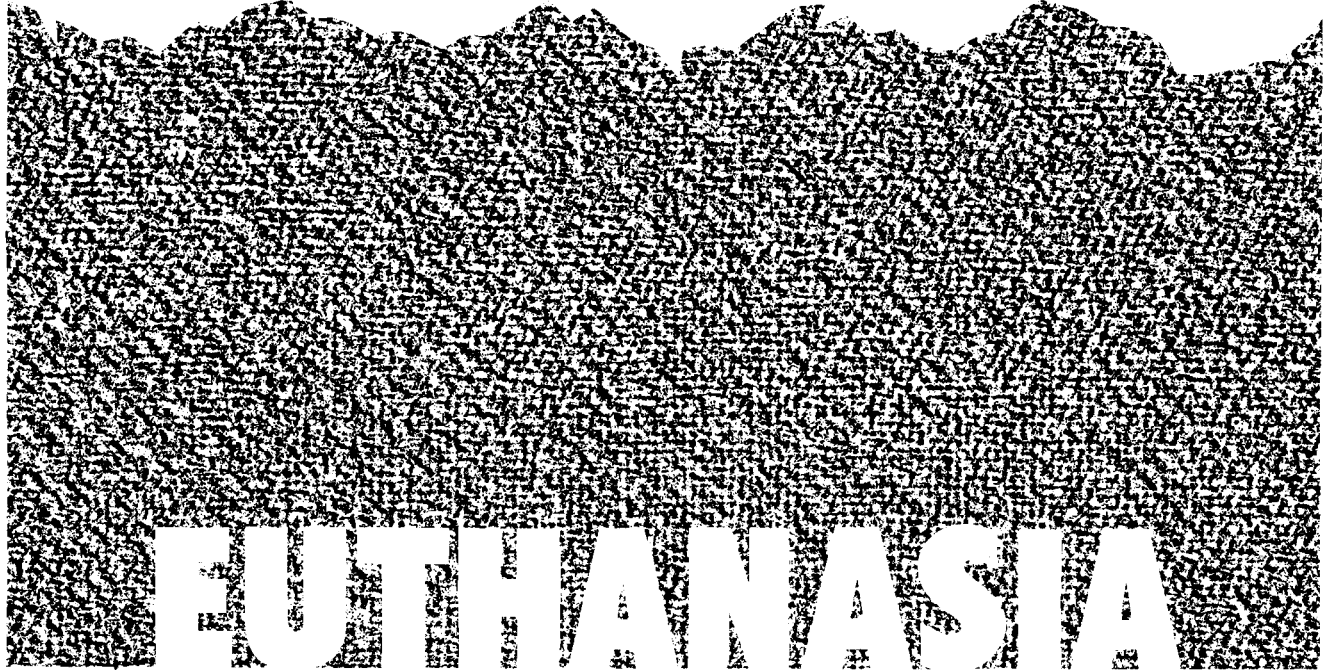
If the West is any example, economic circumstances will force Pakistani women out into a more public life. Already, according to Rahman, upper-class families consider a woman’s education when arranging marriages, seeing it as an indication of future earning power. As for working-class parents, one school principal reported that Pakistani men working abroad, such as in the Gulf, discovered new reasons for educating their daughters. First, the families left behind coped better on their own when members had some schooling. Secondly, the men wanted to receive mail from home; letters from girls as well as boys were treasured. Still, as the protest by would-be women drivers in Saudi Arabia earlier this year made clear, education and increased employment do not automatically translate into a lifting of purdah.

Some of the most interesting developments will come at the level of policy and decision making. When compared with other developing countries, Pakistan commits a very low percentage of its GNP for education. Most of its schools are sex-segregated. If funds are scarce and improved facilities are needed, which will receive priority? The boys’ schools or the girls’ schools?

One little noted achievement of Benazir Bhutto could have a enormous impact on the status of women: cable TV news. The former prime minister allowed CNN to be relayed into Pakistani homes. Some angry letters to the editor appeared complaining about the dangers posed for the Islamic way of life. But the news broadcasts have gained in popularity along with programming on consumer rights, the environment, arts, and fashion.

What then is the future of purdah in Pakistan? While predictions are hazardous, most likely a tiny elite group will press for change while the vast majority of women continue to accept restrictions they view as part of their faith, family life, and place in the world. Support for purdah will erode as more women move to cities, receive higher education, and enter the industrial work force. But the wild cards—in addition to the impact of television—are religion and leadership. The role of so-called Islamic fundamentalists in places such as Egypt, Malaysia, and Iran shows that purdah practices do not automatically disappear as modernization occurs. They can actually deepen as governments strive to project a Muslim identity and avoid any show of undue Western influence. For Pakistani women, leaving purdah will not be as easy as taking off a veil. □

COMMONWEAL



WASHINGTON STATE INITIATIVE 119

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Albert R. Jonsen

CONSIDER THE DUTCH

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WHY DOCTORS MUST NOT KILL

Leon R. Kass

'AID-IN-DYING': THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS

Daniel Callahan

ON NOVEMBER 5 the state of Washington could become the first political entity in the world to legalize active euthanasia. Initiative 119, placed on the ballot in response to voter signatures, defines "aid-in-dying" as a "medical service" to be performed by a physician on request from a terminally ill patient. What would passage of the referendum mean for the medical profession, for individual patients, and for society as a whole? In this special section of *Commonweal*, four close observers examine these and other questions.



INITIATIVE 119:

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Albert R. Jonsen

The state of Washington is a place of serene and majestic beauty. Wide expanses of water, towering forests, broad plains, and splendid mountains surround its 5 million inhabitants in the northwest corner of the "lower forty-eight," as our Alaska neighbors say. In the midst of this beauty lies peril. One of its peaks, Mt. St. Helens, erupted ten years ago, devastating the landscape and, only a few weeks ago, geologists announced that our risk of major earthquake was much greater than had previously been assumed. The Pacific Plate could slip beneath our lovely landscape and busy cities and tear our state to pieces.

The state of Washington is also on the edge of a moral cataclysm. On November 5, 1991, the citizens of this state will vote on Initiative 119. This ballot provision would allow a competent, terminally-ill patient to request of his or her physician "aid-in-dying." These innocuous, indeed benign words, refer to what its proponents describe as "a new medical service." This service consists in the administration or provision of a lethal drug to effect the immediate death of the patient. The benign phrase, "aid-in-dying," like the deceptively beautiful slopes of Mt. St. Helens, conceals the potential for cataclysm. If our citizens approve Initiative 119, we will make our state the first American jurisdiction, indeed, the first jurisdiction in the world, to legalize active euthanasia.

Some persons, particularly its proponents, would see this not as a moral cataclysm, but as moral enlightenment. At last, they say, a government has listened to the voices of those philosophers who construct rational arguments justifying euthanasia and to the pleas of suffering patients requesting a humane and dignified death. Obviously, I take a different view. I am opposed to Initiative

119 and to any policy permitting active euthanasia. However, I rely on others in this issue to put forth extended arguments against the proposition. I will explain what Initiative 119 is and how Washington came to be the site for this historic public decision.

The state of Washington has a history of reasonable public policy about death and dying. California passed the first Natural Death Act in 1976; Washington was the second state to do so, enacting a bill substantially similar to California's in 1979. Its Natural Death Act permits persons to prepare an advance directive authorizing their physician to withhold or withdraw life-sustaining procedures when death is imminent. The legislature subsequently passed a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care law and amended the state statutes to include a list of authorized surrogate decision makers for incompetent patients. Several Supreme Court decisions in the early 1980s endorsed the concepts of total brain death, of forgoing life support of the patient in a persistent vegetative state, and of the right to refuse life-sustaining care. Only on the issue of withdrawal of nutrition and hydration has Washington's Supreme Court maintained a conservative position, at least for mentally incapacitated persons. That decision, *In the Matter of Grant*, is a legal chimera: the majority opinion presents an eloquent argument justifying withdrawal, while the majority vote rejects withdrawal, a judicial oddity resulting from one justice who changed her vote on reconsideration after the opinion was published!

The state, then, has a legal climate open to liberal opinions about issues of death and dying. Its judicial and legislative policies reflect the wide agreement among bioethics scholars and national advisory groups on most issues. This climate might be a favorable one in which to introduce the next question: Should the law tolerate active euthanasia? The Hemlock Society has been seeking an opportunity to put this question before the public. California, Oregon, and Washington are among the few states that have an initiative and referendum process; Washington's dates back to 1911. This process is the heritage of the strong populism that reigned in the Western states at the turn of the century. Citizens can circulate a petition for signatures and, if enough are obtained, place their proposition on the ballot at a general election. A legislative system such as this is ideal for the debate and resolution of broad issues of public concern, although it can place severe restraints on policymakers on such issues as taxation and education.

The Hemlock Society chose to bring the issue of the legality of active euthanasia before the people of California in 1988. The society had its first chapter in Southern California and had developed an organizational base in the state. The group began to gather signatures on an initiative that would exempt from prosecution under the homicide statutes any physician who caused the death of a patient voluntarily requesting such assistance. Because only 137,000 of the requisite 378,000 signatures had been obtained by the deadline, the initiative failed to reach the ballot. Hemlock officials believe that the failure to obtain sufficient signatures was due not so much to opposition to their proposal as to the large number of signatures needed. Given the size of California's electorate, paid signature-gatherers are necessary and Hemlock did not have the funds to organize such an extensive activity. Next, an attempt to mount an initiative

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in Oregon failed to qualify for signature gathering because of a successful challenge to the ballot title.

Washington was the next target of opportunity. In many ways it was more ideal than California. Its population is much smaller and thus only 150,000 signatures were needed. In addition to the progressive legislation and judicial climate about death, Washington has a liberal ethos. The state has a heritage of progressive, even radical, politics. (In the 1930s, one of Roosevelt's cabinet officers raised a toast to "the forty-seven states and the Soviet of Washington!") Perhaps most significant, the attitude of Washington inhabitants is strongly live-and-let-live (or, in this case, let die). Respect for autonomy and privacy is a cherished social value in the Great Northwest. Also, religious opposition, which could be expected to be strong, would not be as powerful in Washington as elsewhere. A recent survey showed Washington as one of the most unchurched states in the nation: at 14 percent, it is surpassed only by its neighbor Oregon (17 percent) in the number of persons who claim no religious affiliation (the national average is 8 percent). Thus, Hemlock's message would be received with tolerance in such a political and moral climate.

Initiative 119 was circulated with the official ballot title, "Shall adult patients who are in a medically terminal condition be permitted to request and receive from a physician aid-in-dying?" The official summary of the initiative read:

This initiative expands the right of adult persons with terminal conditions to have their wishes, expressed in a written directive, regarding life respected. It amends current law to: Expand the definition of terminal condition to include irreversible coma and persistent vegetative state or condition which will result in death within six months; Specify which life-sustaining procedures may be withdrawn; Permit adult persons with terminal conditions to request and receive aid-in-dying from their physicians, facilitating death.

The current law which these provisions will expand is the 1979 Natural Death Act. This legislation, following the California

model, has been criticized for its overly cautious definition of "terminal condition" and for its omission of explicit reference to nutrition and hydration as life-sustaining measures that may be forgone. The initiative amends the act to correct these deficiencies. This aspect of the initiative has generally been welcomed (although defining persistent vegetative state as a "terminal condition" seems a semantic sleight of hand). The final provision, permitting "aid-in-dying," is the radical departure from prevailing law and medical ethics.

The Natural Death Act would be amended to define "aid-in-dying" as "aid in the form of a medical service, provided in person by a physician, that will end the life of a conscious and mentally competent qualified patient in a dignified, painless, and humane manner, when requested voluntarily by the patient through a written directive...at the time the medical service is to be provided." The directive is to be witnessed by two unrelated and impartial persons and the patient must be declared "in a terminal condition" by two physicians. While it is odd to find this mention of an active, voluntary request in a document otherwise devoted to advance directives to be carried out on behalf of incompetent patients, the idea of amending the extant Natural Death Act was politically and psychologically astute. It makes this radical change seem less radical by incorporating it into accepted legislation. It associates it with useful and broadly approved amendments. It fits the radical provision within the relatively conservative safeguards of the extant act.

These safeguards are, however, only relatively conservative. Like most Natural Death legislation, they require witnesses unrelated by family or financial interest and the written declaration by two physicians that the patient is in a terminal condition, that is, the reasonable medical judgment that death will result within six months. However, there is no mention of presence or evaluation of pain and suffering, no reference to stability of the patient's request over time, no requirement for psychological

WASHINGTON STATE Initiative 119

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evaluation (safeguards that are mentioned in reports of the Dutch tolerance of active euthanasia). The patient must simply be diagnosed as being in a terminal condition and make an uncoerced request for aid-in-dying. Most important (and most different from the Dutch practice), Initiative 119 appears to remove the aid-in-dying decision and execution from all legal oversight. The failure of the California initiative, which directly called for exemption from the homicide statutes, was instructive. Proposition 119 buries this feature in the text, mingling it with the previous exemption from criminal liability for physicians who forgo life sustaining treatments in accord with a Directive to Physicians (a very different issue, legally and ethically!).

The public response to the initiative was quite positive. Washington Citizens for Death with Dignity, supported by the Hemlock Society, was able to gather 223,000 signatures. Fortuitously, two cases that received media exposure occurred during the signature gathering: the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the matter of Nancy Cruzan, which stimulated interest in advance directives, and the "mercy killing" of Janet Adkins by means of Dr. Jack Kervorkian's "suicide machine." Ironically, neither case would fit under the provisions of the amended act, since Ms. Cruzan was incapable of making a voluntary request and Mrs. Adkins was not suffering from a "terminal condition." Still, the exposure in the media must have stimulated interest and spurred the signature campaign. The evidence of public acceptance is not out of line with the results of recent national opinion polls that show slight majorities in favor, when asked clear questions about the permissibility of active euthanasia.

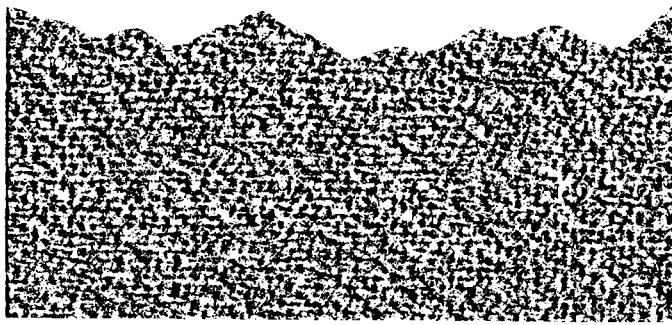
Washington's initiative and referendum law allows an approved initiative to go before the state legislature for action. If the legislature fails to enact the initiative, it is to go on the ballot at the next general election. The legislature decided not to consider the initiative. Astute politicians judged that a ballot measure would split the vote in such a way that Initiative 119 would be assured of victory.

Reaction within the medical community has been hard to interpret. The Washington State Medical Association (WSMA) found itself in a quandary. It had previously endorsed the AMA Ethics and Judicial Council statement that forbids physicians to participate in active euthanasia. At the annual meeting in 1990, the WSMA House of Delegates voted by an overwhelming majority to oppose Initiative 119. However, by March 1991, WSMA members seemed nearly evenly split over the issue. An informal poll of 2,000 members (50 percent responding) indicated a shift in attitude: 49 percent favored WSMA support of Initiative 119, while 51 percent opposed it. The same poll, however, showed that only 28 percent of respondents thought that it should be legal for a physician to give a lethal injection to knowingly hasten death and 30 percent stated that they would personally be willing to aid in a patient's death. In April, the WSMA board of trustees, without rescinding the earlier House of Delegates vote, decided not to recognize officially the private group, Washington Physicians Against 119, which was formed to mount a campaign against passage of the initiative. The WSMA spokesperson stated that since the membership was divided, "there were other ways to oppose it without getting directly involved." The Washington

State Hospital Association takes an opposed position and, while it will not actively campaign, will assist its member institutions to do so. The Washington State Nurses Association at first opposed the initiative and then, after intense lobbying, withdrew its statement of opposition in favor of "no position."

As of this writing, opposition efforts have been modest. Most media coverage has tended to present the initiative in a favorable light, since the appealing stories relate tragic instances of terminal care. It appears to many observers that the public continues to confuse the problem of forgoing life-support with the problem of active euthanasia. The ambiguity of the phrase "aid-in-dying" contributes to that confusion. Most of the anecdotes tell of overuse of life-sustaining technologies rather than of unrelieved pain and suffering. An informal and unpublished survey taken by some opponents suggests that public approval of Initiative 119 diminishes somewhat when people are informed of the difference and when terms such as lethal injection are used rather than aid-in-dying. Still, a recent poll showed that if the vote were held today, 119 would pass. Whether opposition can effect a change in public understanding and sympathy between now and November remains to be seen.

This article began with the dire prediction of a moral cataclysm. This may seem an extreme judgment. Yet to become the first jurisdiction in the world to authorize by formal legal enactment active euthanasia has, in my view, cataclysmic implications. The term literally means a deluge. There will be a flood of persons seeking aid-in-dying, coming from all over the United States and Canada, since only in Washington will their desire to end their lives be honored without fear of prosecution. Hospitals will have to decide not only what stance they will take, but how to inform patients of their position (in accord with the new patient self-determination provisions of Medicare) and even how the new law will affect their admissions and credentialing policies. Physicians will have to form their consciences and, if they choose to provide aid-in-dying, learn how to do it (as a new "medical service" it will, like all others, require standards and training: it is not so easy to effect a "dignified and humane" death). Professional groups will be faced with the task of establishing appropriate self-discipline and surveillance, since, like other medical services, aid-in-dying falls within professional self-regulation. Third-party payers will have to decide whether aid-in-dying is a covered and reimbursable medical service. Legal authorities, since they seem to have no jurisdiction, will have to determine how they deal with suspicious cases and allegations of abuse. Above all—and this is the properly "moral" aspect of the cataclysm—all persons will be presented with the opportunity to relieve themselves and their families and the society of the burdens of their own final illnesses. This is not, I think, an unambiguous opportunity: its implications go far beyond the beneficent promotion of autonomy and the relief of pain and suffering. The considerations, private and public, that must surround it will constitute a social order that, as the dictionary defines cataclysm, sweeps away the old order of things.



EUTHANASIA:

CONSIDER THE DUTCH

Carlos F. Gomez

How ought we die? Should we decide when and how to die? Should we seek death before it finds us, even as a release from our pains, physical and otherwise? Should physicians be the agents who help us commit suicide?

What was once a small, if insistent, chorus of voices lobbying for legalization of euthanasia has grown in both number and volume. It is a chorus of voices that has newly found legitimacy, and has captured the attention of a serious audience in medical circles. This reawakened interest in euthanasia has also generated political activity, the most prominent of which is Initiative 119, which the voters of Washington state will face this November. The referendum, if passed, would in essence overturn existing laws that prohibit physicians from intentionally killing patients.

The focus of concern in this debate over the permissibility of euthanasia has been those patients afflicted with a terminal disease who are dying a slow, disfiguring death. Exhausted from their struggle, dispirited over their prospects, and facing weeks or months of pain, these patients, it is argued, should be offered something that does no more than hasten the inevitable. If they are competent to make decisions—and if they are so inclined—these patients should be allowed to seek assistance with suicide. More specifically, physicians should be permitted (in the words of the Washington initiative) to “render a medical service” to consenting patients, namely, the proffering of drugs with the sole intent of killing.

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Those who make this argument in favor of euthanasia—especially those now engaged in crafting new legislation in Washington state and elsewhere—proceed from two premises, neither of which is easily refuted. The first is that to end a patient’s suffering through euthanasia is a humane and charitable enterprise, that it fits well (or should fit well) with the traditionally accepted role of physician as alleviator of pain. When all else fails—when medicine’s curatives and analgesics neither heal nor palliate—the physician should be able to end a consenting patient’s suffering by killing the patient. The second premise, which complements the first, exalts the widely accepted principle of autonomy and suggests that freely consenting individuals—physicians and patients—should be relatively unfettered in this matter. If a patient so chooses to end his or her life, and if a physician is a willing participant, then euthanasia is permissible. This argument from autonomy finds bold expression in the words of H. Tristram Englehardt (“Death by Free Choice: Variations on an Antique Theme,” in *Suicide and Euthanasia*, edited by Baruch Brody, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989). An apologist for the practice, Englehardt suggests that

against any claims regarding the sanctity of life, counterclaims can be advanced regarding the sanctity of free choice. Another way of putting this is that killing cannot be shown to be a *malum in se*....What is wrong with murder is taking another person’s life without permission. *Consent cures. The competent suicide consents* [emphasis added].

Laws, taboos, and professional canons of conduct that impinge on this freedom, that prohibit what is seen as a charitable act, should be modified or repealed. Moreover, so the argument goes, well-crafted legislation in this area has the added advantage of regulating a practice that occurs with greater frequency and regularity than we care to admit.

I am skeptical of these arguments (even in their most elegant form), and in particular, I am opposed to the end that they serve. There is a suasive power in these images of patients disfigured physically and emotionally by pain and illness, yet I am unconvinced that the proper response—either from the profession of medicine or from society as a whole—should be to assist in suicide. My objections have several sources. Some derive from a basic disagreement with apologists for physician-assisted suicide over what constitutes a fitting role for physicians in society, and what part physicians may and may not play in their patients’ lives. Other objections follow from a profound mistrust that what is portrayed as an act of charity is, in fact, beneficent and good: to acquiesce in a demand, however sincere, is not necessarily the same as to act lovingly.

Were I to develop these objections more fully, this would be a rather different article, focusing on matters more philosophical and theological. I leave that important task to my other colleagues writing in this issue of *Commonweal*, and instead concentrate here on more specific worries: What would this newly codified practice of euthanasia look like? Will it be, as its defenders insist, an exercise of last resort, used only under the most rigidly controlled and tightly circumscribed of circumstances? What kinds of patients will ask for euthanasia, and how will we evaluate

their requests? Finally, and most importantly, how will we regulate this practice? How will we assure ourselves that the weak, the demented, the vulnerable, the stigmatized—those incapable of consent or dissent—will not become the unwilling objects of such a practice?

It is this latter concern which makes me most uneasy, and even if I were won over by other arguments, prudence would still bid me to oppose giving public sanction to the practice. The vulnerable among us are already more exposed than the rest to injustice in various forms; some forms of injustice are more onerous and dangerous than others. No injustice, I would contend, would be greater than being put to death, innocent of crime and unable to articulate one's interests. It is the possibility—or, in my estimation, the likelihood—of such injustice occurring that most hardens my resistance to calls for giving public sanction to euthanasia.

Those who are now proposing the decriminalization of euthanasia, however, argue that it is a practice that can, and should, be well controlled. To argue as I do, it is said, is to deny dying patients a needed and welcome option because of misplaced and unfounded fears. There are certainly dangers here, the argument continues, but a mature and democratic society should be willing and able to construct a public policy that enhances the autonomy of these dying patients, while protecting the rights of others. And that, say the proponents of Initiative 119, is precisely what the proposed law in Washington would do.

Of late, it has been at this point in the argument that proponents of euthanasia have pointed to the Netherlands as a model for this sort of practice. Some segments of the Dutch medical profession have practiced euthanasia, more or less openly, for almost two decades. Proponents of euthanasia in the United States look to the Netherlands as evidence that this practice can be well managed, and that it can be restricted to only those patients who are competent to make such decisions. The experience of the Dutch—who form a humane, tolerant, democratic society—should give at least *some* assurance that this practice does not necessarily degenerate into indiscriminate killing.

The comparison to the Dutch in this matter is an apt one in many ways. The reasoning of those in the United States who defend the permissibility of euthanasia on the grounds that patients should be able to choose the manner and time of their death, for example, is almost perfectly realized in the Dutch acceptance of euthanasia. The Dutch give such weight to the principle of patient autonomy, for instance, that political and legal institutions—such as the courts—have found other competing interests insufficient to override a request for euthanasia. Thus, claims that euthanasia lies outside the ethic of medical practice, or that it creates unjustifiable dangers for vulnerable patients, have been almost completely subordinated to what apologists for the practice cast as the *right* of patients to seek their end through physician-assisted suicide.

There is, moreover, a well-established sentiment in the Netherlands that parallels another argument of those in this country who would decriminalize euthanasia: that there is no distinction between withdrawing life-sustaining medical intervention

during the agonal stages of a patient's illness and killing the patient outright. Thus, the Dutch have dispensed with the terms "active" and "passive" euthanasia, and use the term "euthanasia" simply and exclusively to denote the physician's intentional administration of a lethal drug at the express request of the patient.

The notion that the practice of euthanasia is one which the medical profession can safely incorporate into accepted standards of care, furthermore, receives support from organized medicine in the Netherlands. The K.N.M.G. (the Royal Dutch Society for the Promotion of Medicine) has advanced euthanasia as a permissible medical practice. The K.N.M.G. has not only drawn up guidelines for acceptable use of euthanasia, it has actively pursued legalization of the practice through the legislative and judicial branches of Dutch government. The K.N.M.G. was instrumental, for example, in lending support early on in the euthanasia movement by intervening on behalf of physicians accused of homicide for practicing euthanasia, and by testifying before government commissions on the desirability of the practice from a medical standpoint.

Thus, proponents of euthanasia in the U.S. are, in one sense, correct in drawing parallels between the aims of their movement and the experience of the Dutch with euthanasia. There is a sort of rough truth to the analogy, and defenders of the practice in this country can rightly point to public opinion surveys in the Netherlands that validate the overwhelming endorsement euthanasia receives from at least two-thirds of the lay public, and perhaps an even higher percentage of the medical profession. They can, moreover, point to repeated assurances from officials in both the government and in private professional organizations that the practice is not being abused. It is argued that the Dutch experiment with euthanasia, which is now several years old, demonstrates that the practice is essentially benign, or at the very least, that it has not degenerated into indiscriminate killing.

My own reading of the situation in the Netherlands, however, is more disturbing, and illuminates a side to this practice that rarely finds its way into public debate. I base my opinions on fieldwork I conducted there in 1989, which involved documenting case histories of euthanasia gathered from those most familiar with the practice: Dutch physicians themselves. The reality of euthanasia in the Netherlands is, I believe, miscast and misunderstood in this country. Were it better appreciated, it would, I believe, give pause to those now seeking public sanction for physician-assisted suicide in this country.

To begin with, euthanasia is still technically illegal in the Netherlands. Through a series of complicated landmark cases which began in 1973, however, the Dutch have created a *de facto* opening to the practice of euthanasia, which rests on the notion that physicians will report their acts of euthanasia to public prosecutors. As the practice now stands, tolerance of euthanasia presupposes that the killing of patients by their physicians will receive some sort of airing, that is, that physicians who practice euthanasia will have to give a public accounting of their actions. The intentional killing of a patient is formally a crime, and in reporting such a case to the district prosecutor (as mandated by court-



established guidelines), physicians must claim not *innocence*, but mitigating circumstances—that they acted, in the words of the K.N.M.G., with their “backs against the wall.” Thus regulation of physician-assisted suicide, to the extent that euthanasia is regulated at all in the Netherlands, rests on the assumption that physicians will incriminate themselves in what is essentially an act of homicide.

It stretches the imagination, however, to believe that a stipulation of this sort provides any sort of regulatory force. Most acts of euthanasia in the Netherlands go unreported and uninvestigated by public authorities. What is more, this is widely known to be the case. There is wide agreement among both defenders and critics of the practice that the nearly two hundred cases of euthanasia reported in 1987 to the Ministry of Justice, for example, represent but a tiny fraction of the actual number of cases. In my own small sample of clinical histories, public prosecutors were notified less than 15 percent of the time. Thus, those in this country who look to the Netherlands for evidence of a well-regulated system of physician-assisted suicide are blithely accepting the assurances of Dutch apologists for the practice, who themselves would be hard-pressed to provide evidence of any sort of formal regulatory oversight.

Nevertheless, those in this country who defend the current euthanasia initiative counter that the Washington state proposal is *codified*, that unlike the Dutch situation, euthanasia in this country would have the added benefit of formal legal sanction. What is implied here is that formal rules, unlike the *de facto* legal situation in the Netherlands, somehow have more regulatory muscle to them. Yet one should note that the Washington proposition is *very* like the current Dutch arrangement. There is, in fact, no regulatory oversight in Initiative 119. Like the Dutch situation, the Washington proposal gives permission to physicians to perform what was heretofore an illegal act, stipulates punishment should physicians exceed the boundaries of permissible euthanasia, yet does not provide any mechanism of oversight. Like their counterparts in the Netherlands, the citizens of Washington would be subject to a law that is not *constraining*, but *expansive*. Euthanasia would be one more among the options available in a physician’s armamentarium.

Some might argue here that the Washington proposal does nothing more than give physicians the same latitude they have with other therapies. But there is a slightly deceptive twist to the Washington proposal. A careful reading of the bill reveals that, remarkably enough, in a case of euthanasia, one could not, under the proposed law, impute that the physician’s actions were the proximate cause of death. One suspects that this clause was

inserted to avoid *any* possibility of criminal proceeding against a physician who followed the guidelines of Initiative 119. What it in effect does, however, is place the actions of a euthanist in a sort of regulatory limbo. It makes it difficult (if not impossible) to discern which deaths in a given time period were due to euthanasia. If “respiratory arrest”—and not the massive overdose of narcotics that led to the respiratory arrest—is the official cause of death in an instance of euthanasia, the most basic of epidemiologic studies would be almost impossible to undertake. Cases of euthanasia would blend imperceptibly into the larger background of deaths resulting from natural causes. Unlike *other* iatrogenic deaths—poorly tied surgical knots, inadequate or inappropriately administered medicines—euthanasia would escape the sort of rigorous analysis to which the medical profession routinely subjects, for example, its uncomplicated appendectomies.

The significance of this point is not to be minimized, and here again, the example of the Dutch is instructive. If euthanasia is to become, as its defenders suggest, an option of last resort, then a sense of the *numbers* of patients and *types* of patients being killed by their physicians is important. Yet in Holland, this most basic of information is impossible to ascertain with any assurance of accuracy, precisely because physicians misrepresent themselves on the death certificates. Moreover, absent this sort of essential information, more complicated epidemiologic information becomes a matter of guesswork and speculation.

Proponents of euthanasia here and in the Netherlands use this inaccuracy to their advantage in at least two ways. First, the numbers of patients killed by euthanasia each year are—at least to my mind—consistently underrepresented, because they are based not on mortality statistics but on estimates from surveys. In various articles and forums, for example, Dutch apologists for the practice suggest that euthanasia accounts for, at most, 2 percent to 3 percent of all deaths in the Netherlands. In a country with a published mortality rate of 120,000, this would mean that anywhere from 2,400 to 3,600 people die in the Netherlands from euthanasia each year. This number is used by defenders of the practice—both here and abroad—to demonstrate that euthanasia would be little more than a statistical blip—essentially undetectable—on a country’s already established mortality rate. But to give the Dutch estimates of the prevalence of euthanasia some perspective, one should note that if this rate of euthanasia were to take hold in the United States (with an annual mortality rate of approximately 2 million deaths per year), a “small” number of deaths from euthanasia would represent 40,000 to 60,000 people killed each year by their physicians.

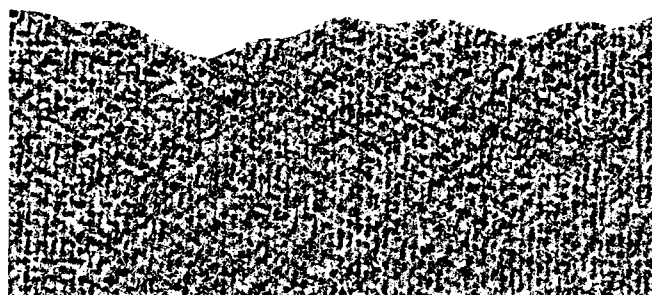
Secondly, it is important to keep these numbers in mind—even if they are, as I suggest, underestimates—because apologists for the practice suggest that not only are the numbers of people who die, or would die, from euthanasia small, evidence of abuse of the practice is even smaller. That is to say, most of this “small” number of people killed by euthanasia ardently requested to be put to death, were of sound mind, had no other options available,

and so on. And to be fair, in my own sample of cases of euthanasia from the Netherlands, most cases did fit the criteria established by the courts and the Dutch medical profession. Yet there were enough cases—four out of twenty-six, to be exact—in which it was clear that the patient was incapable of giving consent, or in which it was doubtful that consent could have been obtained properly. In none of these cases, by the way, was the public prosecutor notified.

This raises, finally, the question of how well this practice can genuinely be regulated, and what this society would accept as a tolerable degree of assurance that its most vulnerable people—the weak, the unconscious, the demented, the socially stigmatized and marginalized—would be well protected from an unwanted death. If one were to assume that the accepted prevalence rates of euthanasia in the Netherlands would take hold in the U.S., then how many of the projected 40,000 to 60,000 deaths from euthanasia per year would we be willing to accept as “mistakes”? Even a relatively small percentage—say 1 percent—would mean that 400 to 600 people would die, innocent and unwilling, at the hands of physicians. And even that number, I suggest, would underestimate the proportions of the crime.

Those who now face the choice of the legalization of euthanasia in the state of Washington should, I submit, look at the issue with greater care. Moreover, if they use the Netherlands as a model, they might do well to take a second look, and see if the experience of the Dutch might better serve as a cautionary tale. To construct this matter of euthanasia as merely a question of patient autonomy is, I believe, to give short shrift to those who cannot be truly autonomous. The fact that these people are voiceless—that they do not vote, do not write or read articles, cannot advance their own interests—makes them particularly worthy of our concern. The practice of euthanasia—at least as currently envisaged for the state of Washington—would place these patients at intolerable risk. And if, as I have suggested, the Dutch—with their generous social services and universal health-care coverage—have a difficult time controlling the practice, it takes little imagination to see what might easily happen here, with a medical system groaning under the strain of too many demands on too few resources.

Those who would suggest that I am an alarmist—that I am raising the specter of “mercy-killing,” with all its ugly and painful historical baggage—should stop to consider the *current* condition of vulnerable patients in this country. One needs only to walk some afternoon through the back wards of the larger municipal hospitals in this country to get an idea of how tenuous these patients’ existence already is. To suggest that euthanasia would be anything but an unjustifiable danger to these patients is to close one’s eyes to reality. The cries of those who die in pain and despair, amid the studied indifference of professionals whose duty it is to attend to their needs, should be heard. That their cries are gaining in intensity—that some segments of society feel that they should have the option of being helped in their suicide—stands as a reproach to us. What I ask, however, is that those desperate cries for release from pain be balanced against the needs of the voiceless, who even in their silence, still have a right to live.



WHY DOCTORS

MUST NOT KILL

Leon R. Kass

Do you want your doctor licensed to kill? Should he or she be permitted or encouraged to inject or prescribe poison? Shall the mantle of privacy that protects the doctor-patient relationship, in the service of life and wholeness, now also cloak decisions for death? Do you want *your* doctor deciding, on the basis of his own private views, when you still deserve to live and when you now deserve to die? And what about the other fellow’s doctor—that shallow technician, that insensitive boor who neither asks nor listens, that unprincipled money-grubber, that doctor you used to go to until you got up the nerve to switch: do you want *him* licensed to kill? Speaking generally, shall the healing profession become also the euthanizing profession?

Common sense has always answered, “No.” For more than two millennia, the reigning medical ethic, mindful that the power to cure is also the power to kill, has held as an inviolable rule, “Doctors must not kill.” Yet this venerable taboo is now under attack. Proponents of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide would have us believe that it is but an irrational vestige of religious prejudice, alien to a true ethic of medicine, which stands in the way of a rational and humane approach to suffering at the end of life. Nothing could be further from the truth. The taboo against doctors killing patients (even on request) is the very embodiment of reason and wisdom. Without it, medicine will have trouble doing its proper work; without it, medicine will have lost its claim to be an ethical and trustworthy profession; without it, all of us will suffer—yes, more than we now suffer because some of us are not soon enough released from life.

Consider first the damaging consequences for the doctor-patient relationship. The patient’s trust in the doctor’s whole-

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hearted devotion to the patient's best interests will be hard to sustain once doctors are licensed to kill. Imagine the scene: you are old, poor, in failing health, and alone in the world; you are brought to the city hospital with fractured ribs and pneumonia. The nurse or intern enters late at night with a syringe full of yellow stuff for your intravenous drip. How soundly will you sleep? It will not matter that your doctor has never yet put anyone to death; that he is legally entitled to do so will make a world of difference.

And it will make a world of psychic difference too for conscientious physicians. How easily will they be able to care wholeheartedly for patients when it is always possible to think of killing them as a "therapeutic option"? Shall it be penicillin and a respirator one more time, or, perhaps, this time just an overdose of morphine? Physicians get tired of treating patients who are hard to cure, who resist their best efforts, who are on their way down—"gorks," "gomers," and "vegetables" are only some of the less than affectionate names they receive from the house officers. Won't it be tempting to think that death is the best "treatment" for the little old lady "dumped" again on the emergency room by the nearby nursing home?

It is naive and foolish to take comfort from the fact that the currently proposed change in the law provides "aid-in-dying" only to those who request it. For we know from long experience how difficult it is to discover what we truly want when we are suffering. Verbal "requests" made under duress rarely reveal the whole story. Often a demand for euthanasia is, in fact, an angry or anxious plea for help, born of fear of rejection or abandonment, or made in ignorance of available alternatives that could alleviate pain and suffering. Everyone knows how easy it is for those who control the information to engineer requests and to manipulate choices, especially in the vulnerable. Paint vividly a horrible prognosis, and contrast it with that "gentle, quick release": which will the depressed or frightened patient choose, especially in the face of a spiraling hospital bill or children who visit grudgingly? Yale Kamisar asks the right questions: "Is this the kind of choice, assuming that it can be made in a fixed and rational manner, that we want to offer a gravely ill person? Will we not sweep up, in the process, some who are not really tired of life, but think others are tired of them; some who do not really want to die, but who feel that they should not live on, because to do so when there looms the legal alternative of euthanasia is to do a selfish or cowardly act? Will not some feel an obligation to have themselves 'eliminated' in order that funds allocated for their terminal care might be better used by their families or, financial worries aside, in order to relieve their families of the emotional strain involved?"

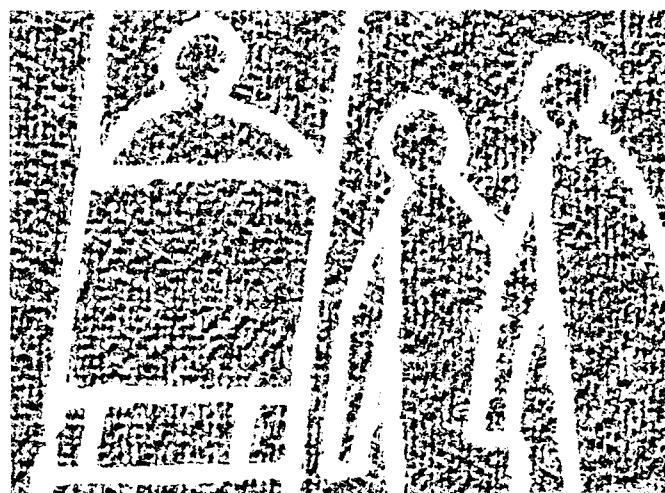
Euthanasia, once legalized, will not remain confined to those who freely and knowingly elect it—and the most energetic backers of euthanasia do not really want it thus restricted. Why? Because the vast majority of candidates who merit mercy-killing cannot request it for themselves: adults with persistent vegetative state or severe depression or senility or aphasia or mental illness or Alzheimer's disease; infants who are deformed; and children who are retarded or dying. All incapable of requesting death.

they will thus be denied our new humane "assistance-in-dying." But not to worry. The lawyers and the doctors (and the cost-containers) will soon rectify this injustice. The enactment of a law legalizing mercy killing (or assisted suicide) on voluntary request will certainly be challenged in the courts under the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Why, it will be argued, should the comatose or the demented be denied the right to such a "dignified death" or such a "treatment" just because they cannot claim it for themselves? With the aid of court-appointed proxy consenters, we will quickly erase the distinction between the right to choose one's own death and the right to request someone else's—as we have already done in the termination-of-treatment cases.

Clever doctors and relatives will not need to wait for such changes in the law. Who will be around to notice when the elderly, poor, crippled, weak, powerless, retarded, uneducated, demented, or gullible are mercifully released from the lives their doctors, nurses, and next of kin deem no longer worth living? In Holland, for example, a recent survey of 300 physicians (conducted by an author who supports euthanasia) disclosed that over 40 percent had performed euthanasia *without the patient's request*, and over 10 percent had done so in more than five cases. Is there any reason to believe that the average American physician is, in his private heart, more committed than his Dutch counterpart to the equal worth and dignity of every life under his care? Do we really want to find out what he is like, once the taboo is broken?

Even the most humane and conscientious physician psychologically needs protection against himself and his weaknesses, if he is to care fully for those who entrust themselves to him. A physician-friend who worked many years in a hospice caring for dying patients explained it to me most convincingly: "Only because I knew that I could not and would not kill my patients was I able to enter most fully and intimately into caring for them as they lay dying." The psychological burden of the license to kill (not to speak of the brutalization of the physician-killers) could very well be an intolerably high price to pay for the physician-assisted euthanasia.

The point, however, is not merely psychological: it is also moral and essential. My friend's horror at the thought that he might be tempted to kill his patients, were he not enjoined from



doing so, embodies a deep understanding of the medical ethic and its intrinsic limits. We move from assessing consequences to looking at medicine itself.

The beginning of ethics regarding the use of power generally lies in nay-saying. The wise setting of limits on the use of power is based on discerning the excesses to which the power, unrestrained, is prone. Applied to the professions, this principle would establish strict outer boundaries—indeed, inviolable taboos—against those “occupational hazards” to which each profession is especially prone. *Within* these outer limits, no fixed rules of conduct apply; instead, prudence—the wise judgment of the man-on-the-spot—finds and adopts the best course of action in the light of the circumstances. But the outer limits themselves are fixed, firm, and non-negotiable.

What are those limits for medicine? At least three are set forth in the venerable Hippocratic Oath: no breach of confidentiality; no sexual relations with patients; no dispensing of deadly drugs. These unqualified, self-imposed restrictions are readily understood in terms of the temptations to which the physician is most vulnerable, temptations in each case regarding an area of vulnerability and exposure that the practice of medicine requires of patients. Patients necessarily divulge and reveal private and intimate details of their personal lives; patients necessarily expose their naked bodies to the physician’s objectifying gaze and investigating hands; patients necessarily expose and entrust the care of their very lives to the physician’s skill, technique, and judgment. The exposure is, in all cases, one-sided and asymmetric: the doctor does not reveal his intimacies, display his nakedness, offer up his embodied life to the patient. Mindful of the meaning of such nonmutual exposure, the physician voluntarily sets limits on his own conduct, pledging not to take advantage of or to violate the patient’s intimacies, naked sexuality, or life itself.

The prohibition against killing patients, the first negative promise of self-restraint sworn to in the Hippocratic Oath, stands as medicine’s first and most abiding taboo: “I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect....In purity and holiness I will guard my life and my art.” In forswearing the giving of poison, the physician recognizes and restrains a god-like power he wields over patients, mindful that his drugs can both cure and kill. But in forswearing the giving of poison, *when asked for it*, the Hippocratic physician rejects the view that the patient’s choice for death can make killing him—or assisting his suicide—right. For the physician, at least, human life in living bodies commands respect and reverence—*by its very nature*. As its respectability does not depend upon human agreement or patient consent, revocation of one’s consent to live does not deprive one’s living body of respectability. The deepest ethical principle restraining the physician’s power is not the autonomy or freedom of the patient; neither is it his own compassion or good intention. Rather, it is the dignity and mysterious power of human life itself, and, therefore, also what the oath calls the purity and holiness of the life and art to which he has sworn devotion. A person can choose to be a physician, but he cannot simply choose what physicianship means.

The central meaning of physicianship derives not from medicine’s powers but from its goal, not from its means but from its end: to benefit the sick by the activity of healing. The physician as physician serves only the sick. He does not serve the relatives or the hospital or the national debt inflated due to Medicare costs. Thus he will never sacrifice the well-being of the sick to the convenience or pocketbook or feelings of the relatives or society. Moreover, the physician serves the sick not because they have rights or wants or claims, but because they are sick. The healer works with and for those who need to be healed, in order to help make them whole. Despite enormous changes in medical technique and institutional practice, despite enormous changes in nosology and therapeutics, the center of medicine has not changed: it is as true today as it was in the days of Hippocrates that the ill desire to be whole; that wholeness means a certain well-working of the enlivened body and its unimpaired powers to sense, think, feel, desire, move, and maintain itself; and that the relationship between the healer and the ill is constituted, essentially even if only tacitly, around the desire of both to promote the wholeness of the one who is ailing.

Can wholeness and healing ever be compatible with intentionally killing the patient? Can one benefit the patient as a whole by making him dead? There is, of course, a logical difficulty: how can any good exist for a being that is not? But the error is more than logical: to intend and to act for someone’s good requires his continued existence to receive the benefit.

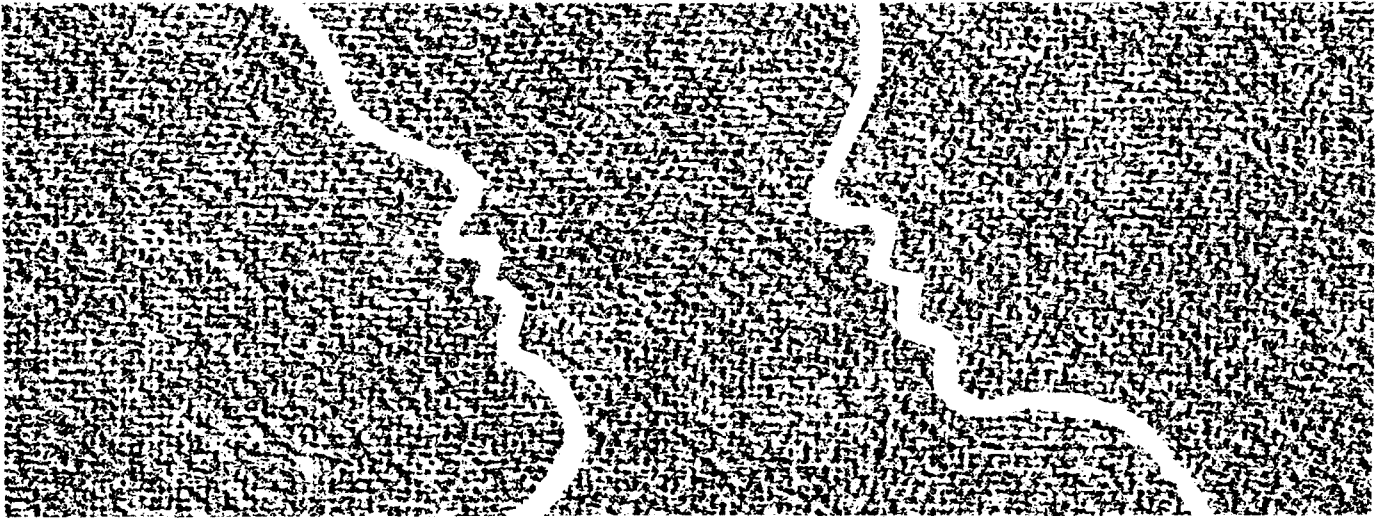
To be sure, certain attempts to benefit may in fact turn out, unintentionally, to be lethal. Giving adequate morphine to control pain might induce respiratory depression leading to death. But the intent to relieve the pain of the living presupposes that the living still live to be relieved. This must be the starting point in discussing all medical benefits: no benefit without a beneficiary.

Against this view, someone will surely bring forth the hard cases: patients so ill-served by their bodies that they can no longer bear to live, bodies riddled with cancer and racked with pain, against which their “owners” protest in horror and from which they insist on being released. Cannot the person “in the body” speak up against the rest, and request death for “personal” reasons?

However sympathetically we listen to such requests, we must see them as incoherent. Such person-body dualism cannot be sustained. “Personhood” is manifest on earth only in living bodies; our highest mental functions are held up by, and are inseparable from, lowly metabolism, respiration, circulation, excretion. There may be blood without consciousness, but there is never consciousness without blood. Thus one who calls for death in the service of personhood is like a tree seeking to cut its roots for the sake of growing its highest fruit. No physician, devoted to the benefit of the sick, can serve the patient as person by denying and thwarting his personal embodiment.

To say it plainly, to bring nothingness is incompatible with serving wholeness: one cannot heal—or comfort—by making nil. The healer cannot annihilate if he is truly to heal. The physician-euthanizer is a deadly self-contradiction.

But we must acknowledge a difficulty. The central goal of medicine—health—is, in each case, a perishable good: inevitably,



patients get irreversibly sick, patients degenerate, patients die. Healing the sick is *in principle* a project that must at some point fail. And here is where all the trouble begins: How does one deal with “medical failure”? What does one seek when restoration of wholeness—or “much” wholeness—is by and large out of the question?

Contrary to the propaganda of the euthanasia movement, there is, in fact, much that can be done. Indeed, by recognizing finitude yet knowing that we will not kill, we are empowered to focus on easing and enhancing the *lives* of those who are dying. First of all, medicine can follow the lead of the hospice movement and—abandoning decades of shameful mismanagement—provide truly adequate (and now technically feasible) relief of pain and discomfort. Second, physicians (and patients and families) can continue to learn how to withhold or withdraw those technical interventions that are, in truth, merely burdensome or degrading medical additions to the unhappy end of a life—including, frequently, hospitalization itself. Ceasing treatment and allowing death to occur when (and if) it will seem to be quite compatible with the respect life itself commands for itself. Doctors may and must allow to die, even if they must not intentionally kill.

Ceasing medical intervention, allowing nature to take its course, differs fundamentally from mercy killing. For one thing, death does not necessarily follow the discontinuance of treatment; Karen Ann Quinlan lived more than ten years after the court allowed the “life-sustaining” respirator to be removed. Not the physician, but the underlying fatal illness becomes the true cause of death. More important morally, in ceasing treatment the physician need not *intend* the death of the patient, even when the death follows as a result of his omission. His intention should be to avoid useless and degrading medical *additions* to the already sad end of a life. In contrast, in active, direct mercy killing the physician must, necessarily and indubitably, intend *primarily* that the patient be made dead. And he must knowingly and indubitably cast himself in the role of the agent of death. This remains true even if he is merely an assistant in suicide. A physician who provides the pills or lets the patient plunge the syringe after

he leaves the room is *morally* no different from one who does the deed himself. “I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect.”

Once we refuse the technical fix, physicians and the rest of us can also rise to the occasion: we can learn to act humanly in the presence of finitude. Far more than adequate morphine and the removal of burdensome machinery, the dying need our presence and our encouragement. Dying people are all too easily reduced ahead of time to “thinghood” by those who cannot bear to deal with the suffering or disability of those they love. Withdrawal of contact, affection, and care is the greatest single cause of the dehumanization of dying. Not the alleged humanness of an elixir of death, but the humanness of connected living-while-dying is what medicine—and the rest of us—most owe the dying. The treatment of choice is company and care.

The euthanasia movement would have us believe that the physician’s refusal to assist in suicide or perform euthanasia constitutes an affront to human dignity. Yet one of their favorite arguments seems to me rather to prove the reverse. Why, it is argued, do we put animals out of their misery but insist on compelling fellow human beings to suffer to the bitter end? Why, if it is not a contradiction for the veterinarian, does the medical ethic absolutely rule out mercy killing? Is this not simply inhumane?

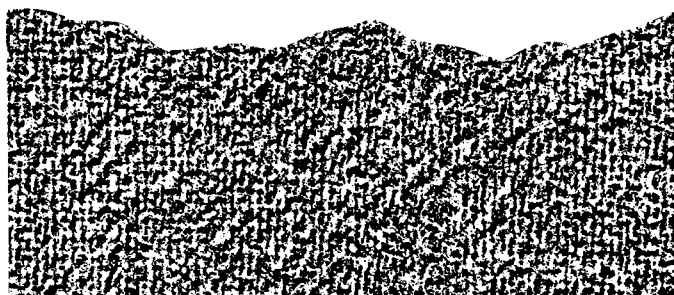
Perhaps *inhumane*, but not thereby *inhuman*. On the contrary, it is precisely because animals are not human that we must treat them (merely) humanely. We put dumb animals to sleep because they do not know that they are dying, because they can make nothing of their misery or mortality, and, therefore, because they cannot live deliberately—i.e., humanly—in the face of their own suffering and dying. They cannot live out a fitting end. Compassion for their weakness and dumbness is our only appropriate emotion, and given our responsibility for their care and well-being, we do the only humane thing we can. But when a conscious human being asks us for death, by that very action he displays the presence of something that precludes our regarding him as a dumb animal. Humanity is owed humanity, not humanness. Humanity is owed the bolstering of the human, even or especially in its dying moments, in resistance to the temptation to ignore its presence in the sight of suffering.

What humanity needs most in the face of evils is courage, the ability to stand against fear and pain and thoughts of nothingness. The deaths we most admire are those of people who, knowing that they are dying, face the fact frontally and act accordingly: they set their affairs in order, they arrange what could be final meetings with their loved ones, and yet, with strength of soul and a small reservoir of hope, they continue to live and work and love as much as they can for as long as they can. Because such conclusions of life require courage, they call for our encouragement—and for the many small speeches and deeds that shore up the human spirit against despair and defeat.

Many doctors are in fact rather poor at this sort of encouragement. They tend to regard every dying or incurable patient as a failure, as if an earlier diagnosis or a more vigorous intervention might have avoided what is, in truth, an inevitable collapse. The enormous successes of medicine these past fifty years have made both doctors and laymen less prepared than ever to accept the fact of finitude. Doctors behave, not without some reason, as if they have godlike powers to revive the moribund; laymen expect an endless string of medical miracles. Physicians today are not likely to be agents of encouragement once their technique begins to fail.

It is, of course, partly for these reasons that doctors will be pressed to kill—and many of them will, alas, be willing. Having adopted a largely technical approach to healing, having medicalized so much of the end of life, doctors are being asked—often with thinly veiled anger—to provide a final technical solution for the evil of human finitude and for their own technical failure: If you cannot cure me, kill me. The last gasp of autonomy or cry for dignity is asserted against a medicalization and institutionalization of the end of life that robs the old and the incurable of most of their autonomy and dignity: intubated and electrified, with bizarre mechanical companions, once proud and independent people find themselves cast in the roles of passive, obedient, highly disciplined children. People who care for autonomy and dignity should try to reverse this dehumanization of the last stages of life, instead of giving dehumanization its final triumph by welcoming the desperate goodbye-to-all-that contained in one final plea for poison.

The present crisis that leads some to press for active euthanasia is really an opportunity to learn the limits of the medicalization of life and death and to recover an appreciation of living with and against mortality. It is an opportunity for physicians to recover an understanding that there remains a residual human wholeness—however precarious—that can be cared for even in the face of incurable and terminal illness. Should doctors cave in, should doctors become technical dispensers of death, they will not only be abandoning their posts, their patients, and their duty to care; they will set the worst sort of example for the community at large—teaching technicism and so-called humaneness where encouragement and humanity are both required and sorely lacking. On the other hand, should physicians hold fast, should doctors learn that finitude is no disgrace and that human wholeness can be cared for to the very end, medicine may serve not only the good of its patients, but also, by example, the failing moral health of modern times.



'AID-IN-DYING':

THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS

Daniel Callahan

The fear of dying is powerful. Even more powerful sometimes is the fear of not dying, of being forced to endure destructive pain, or to live out a life of unrelieved, pointless suffering. The movement to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide is a strong and, seemingly, historically inevitable response to that fear. It draws part of its strength from the failure of modern medicine to reassure us that it can manage our dying with dignity and comfort. It draws another part from the desire to be masters of our fate. Why must we endure that which need not be endured? If medicine cannot always bring us the kind of death we might like through its technical skills, why can it not use them to give us a quick and merciful release? Why can we not have "aid-in-dying," as Washington state's Initiative 119 phrases it?

Yet perhaps the most compelling attraction is that euthanasia appears as simply one more logical, long overdue extension of a right long recognized in this country. Exactly a century ago, in the 1891 *Union Pacific v. Botsford* case, the Supreme Court held that "No right is more sacred, or is more carefully guarded, by the common law, than the right of the individual to the possession and control of his own person." That right has been reaffirmed time and again, and especially underscored in those rulings—most recently the *Cruzan* case—that declare our right to terminate medical treatment and thus to die.

But if it should happen to be impossible for us to so easily bring about our own death, would it not be reasonable to ask someone else, specifically a doctor, to help us to die? Would it not, moreover, be an act of mercy for a doctor to give us that kind of a release? Is not the relief of suffering a high moral good?

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To say “no” in response to questions of that kind seems both repressive and cruel. They invoke our cherished political values of liberty and self-determination. They draw upon our deep and long-standing moral commitment to the relief of suffering. They bespeak our ancient efforts to triumph over death, to find a way to bring it to heel.

Nonetheless, we should as a society say no, and decisively so, to euthanasia and assisted suicide. Initiative 119 should be defeated. If a death marked by pain or suffering is a nasty death, a natural biological evil of a supreme kind, euthanasia and assisted suicide are wrong and harmful responses to that evil. To directly kill another person in the name of mercy (as I will define “euthanasia” here), or to assist another to commit suicide (which seems to me logically little different from euthanasia) would add to a society already burdened with man-made evils still another.

Euthanasia is mistakenly understood as only a personal matter of self-determination, the control of our own bodies, just a small step beyond the removal of legal prohibitions against suicide. Unlike suicide, euthanasia should be understood as of its nature a social act. It is social because, by definition, it requires the assistance of someone else, as the expression “aid-in-dying” itself makes clear.

Legalization would also provide an important social sanction for euthanasia, affecting many aspects of our society beyond the immediate relief of suffering individuals. The implications of that sanction are profound. It would change the traditional role of the physician. It would require the regulation and oversight of government. It would add to the acceptable range of permissible killing in our society still another occasion for one person to take the life of another.

We might decide that we are as a people prepared to live with those implications. But we should not deceive ourselves into thinking of euthanasia or assisted suicide as merely personal acts, just a slight extension of the already-established right to control our bodies and to have medical treatment terminated. It is a radical move into an entirely different realm of morality: that of the killing of one person by another.

All civilized societies have developed laws to reduce the occasions on which one person is allowed to kill another person. All have resisted the notion that private agreements can be reached allowing one person to take the life of another to serve the interests of one or both parties. Traditionally, only three circumstances have been acceptable for the taking of life: killing in self-defense or to protect another life, killing in the course of a just war, and, in the case of capital punishment, killing by agents of the state. Killing in both war and capital punishment has been opposed by some, and most successfully in the case of capital punishment, now banned in many countries, particularly those of Western Europe.

Apart from those long-standing debates, what is most notable about the historically licit conditions of killing is (1) the requirement that killing is permissible only when relatively objective standards have been met (in war or self-defense, a genuine threat to life or vital goods, and the absence of an alternative means

of meeting those threats); and (2) when the public good is thereby served. (Even in self-defense, the permission to kill has some element of fostering a sense of public security in the face of personal threats.)

The proposal for “aid-in-dying” is nothing less than a proposal to add a new category of acceptable killing to those already socially accepted. To do so would be to reverse the long-developing trend to limit the occasions of legally sanctioned killing (most notable in the campaigns to abolish capital punishment and to limit access to firearms). Civilized societies have slowly come to understand how virtually impossible it is to control even legally sanctioned killing. It seems of its nature to invite abuse. Most notably, the proposal would reinstate private killings. By a “private” killing I mean one in which the agreement of one person to kill another is ratified in private by the persons themselves, not by public authorities (even if it is made legal and safeguards are put into effect). Do we want to give one person the right to kill another for the sake of the relief of pain and suffering? That is the question before us.

The law does not now allow, in the United States or elsewhere, the right of one person to kill another even if the latter requests, or consents, that it be done. All civilized societies have also outlawed private killings, either in the name of honor (dueling, for instance), or to right private wrongs (to revenge adulterous relationships, for instance).

Yet if we generally accept in our society a right to control our own life and body, why has the extension of that right to private killing been denied? The most obvious reason is a reluctance to give one person absolute and irrevocable power over the life of another, whether there is consent or not. That prohibition is a way of saying that the social stakes in the legitimization of killing are extraordinarily high. It is to recognize that a society should—for the mutual protection of all—be exceedingly parsimonious about conferring a right to kill on anyone, for whatever reason.

John Stuart Mill, in his classic essay *On Liberty*, noted that civilized societies do not grant individuals a legal right to sell themselves into slavery, even though that denial is a limitation on self-determination. “The principle of freedom,” he wrote, “cannot require that he should be free not to be free. It is not freedom to be allowed to alienate his freedom.”

Yet it is not just the ceding of freedom that is problematic. The absolute power that is put into the hands of another, I would add—the right to be a slaveholder—is not compatible with respect for our human dignity. Both the slaveholder and the enslaved are corrupted by the relationship, even if both have the good of the other as their motive. The one gives up too much, and the other has too much given him.

A similar consideration applies in the case of killings authorized in the name of mercy: they give one person an absolute power over another. Our right to self-determination can be likened, as Joel Feinberg has put it, to an absolute sovereignty (*Notre Dame Law Review*, February 1983). Our life is our own, not someone else’s: “There is no such thing as ‘trivial interference’ with personal sovereignty; nor is it simply another value to be weighed in cost-benefit comparison. In this respect, if not others, a trivial

interference with sovereignty is like a minor invasion of virginity: the logic of each concept is such that a value is respected in its entirety or not at all."

Understood one way, this is exactly the kind of argument that might conventionally be taken to justify euthanasia: my life is my own, to do with as I please. I draw exactly the opposite conclusion (though Feinberg may not). We cannot, I believe, transfer our sovereignty to another without contradicting it. A sovereignty that can legally and morally be given away is fragile and contingent, not sovereignty at all. To allow another person to kill us is the most radical relinquishment of sovereignty imaginable, not just one more way of exercising it. Our life belongs no longer to us, but to the person into whose power we give it. No person should have that kind of power over another, freely gained or not. No defender of civil liberties and the right of self-determination should want to see that possibility made available.

Does it not make a difference that the absolute power is given, not to subjugate another (as in slavery), but as an act of mercy, to bring relief from suffering? This might matter but for one crucial consideration. The suffering of the person to be killed is subjective, unmeasurable by and intangible to an outside observer. However real and intense to the person himself or herself, it cannot be gauged from the outside by any objective standard. We know that pain and suffering can vary enormously from one person to another, even those with identical medical conditions. To legalize euthanasia would thus be to authorize one person to kill another based on indeterminable, variable, and subjective expressions of suffering. I can think of no other area of medical practice where equally drastic, irreversible actions are taken on the basis of unmeasurable symptoms. There is no way for the doctor to distinguish between the reasonableness of one person who suffers greatly, but wants to continue living, and that of another person with similar suffering who wants to be dead. It is not the suffering as such that makes the difference, I believe, but the attitude taken toward it. In saying this I do not deny the reality of suffering. I am only underscoring how inaccessible the intensity of suffering can be to the external observer, and also how it must express the meaning given to it, not merely its brute psychological intensity.

We must, then, determine whether, with that inaccessibility in mind, it would be wise to sanction the absolute power of one

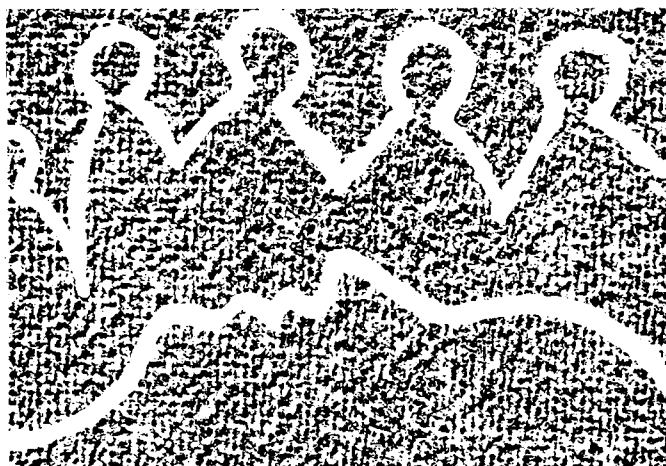
individual to terminate the life of another. It is not sufficient to say that, in the case of some dying patients, they cannot otherwise exercise their own right to end their suffering (assuming suicide not to be possible), and that therefore they may, because they must, give over that right to another. The difference is that, by giving one person the right to kill another, we are creating a new social institution—private killing to relieve private suffering—and an institution that will rest upon the most insecure foundation, the transfer of our sovereign right of self-determination to another.

There is another problem. If the person who is to kill is to do so in a responsible fashion, then he or she must have some independent standards for determining when to honor such requests. This becomes all the more important when it is argued, as it sometimes is, that a doctor has not just a right to respond to a request for euthanasia but that, in the name of a duty to relieve suffering, there can be a positive obligation to do so.

We come here to a striking pitfall of the common argument for euthanasia and assisted suicide. Once the key premises of that argument are accepted, there will remain no logical way in the future to: (1) deny euthanasia to anyone who requests it for whatever reason, terminal illness or not; or to (2) deny it to the suffering incompetent, even if they do not request it. We can erect legal safeguards and specify required procedures to keep that from happening. But over time they will provide poor protection if the logic of the moral premises upon which they are based are fatally flawed.

Where are the flaws here? Recall that there are two classical arguments in favor of euthanasia and assisted suicide: our right of self-determination, and our claim upon the mercy of others, especially doctors, to relieve our suffering if they can do so. These two arguments are typically spliced together and presented as a single contention. Yet if they are considered independently—and there is no inherent reason why they must be linked—they display serious problems. Consider, first, the argument for our right of self-determination. It is said that a competent, adult person should have a right to euthanasia for the relief of suffering. But why must the person be suffering? Does not that stipulation already compromise the right of self-determination? How can self-determination have any limits? Why are not the person's desires or motives, whatever they may be, sufficient? How can we justify this arbitrary limitation of self-determination? The standard arguments for euthanasia offer no answers to those questions.

Consider next the person who is suffering but not competent, who is perhaps demented or mentally retarded. The standard argument (and the proposed Washington state law) would deny euthanasia to that person. But why? If a person is suffering but not competent, then it would seem grossly unfair to deny relief simply because that person lacks competence. Are the incompetent less entitled to relief from suffering than the competent? Will it only be affluent middle-class people, mentally fit and able, who can qualify? Will those who are incompetent but suffering be denied that which those who are intellectually and



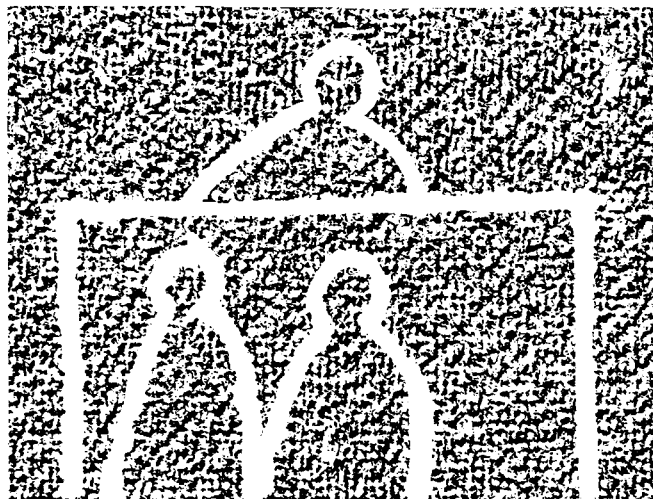
emotionally better off can have? Would that be fair? Do they suffer less for being incompetent? The standard argument about our duty to relieve suffering offers no response to those questions either.

Is it, however, fair to euthanasia advocates to do what I have done, to separate, and treat individually, the two customary arguments in favor of a legal right to euthanasia? The implicit reason for so joining them is no doubt the desire to avoid abuse. By requiring a showing of suffering and terminal illness, the aim is to exclude perfectly healthy people from demanding that, in the name of self-determination and for their own private reasons, another person can be called upon to kill them. By requiring a show of mental competence to effect self-determination, the aim is to exclude the nonvoluntary killing of the depressed, the retarded, and the demented.

My contention is that the joining of those two requirements is perfectly arbitrary, a jerry-rigged combination if ever there was one. Each has its own logic, and each could be used to justify euthanasia. But in the nature of the case that logic, it seems evident, offers little resistance to denying any competent person the right to be killed, sick or not; and little resistance to killing the incompetent, so long as there is good reason to believe they are suffering. There is no principled reason to reject that logic, and no reason to think it could long remain suppressed by the expedient of arbitrary legal stipulations.

There is a related problem worth considering. If the act of euthanasia, conventionally understood, requires the request and consent of the patient, it no less requires that the person to do the killing have his or her own independent moral standards for acceding to the request. The doctor must act with integrity. How can a doctor who voluntarily brings about, or is instrumental in, the death of another legitimately justify that to herself? Would the mere claim of self-determination on the part of someone be sufficient—"it is my body, Doctor, and I request that you kill me"? There is a widespread resistance to that kind of claim, and doctors quite rightly have never been willing to do what patients want just because they want it. There is surely a legitimate fear that, if such a claim were sanctioned, there would be no reason to forbid any two competent persons from entering into an agreement for one to kill the other. Perhaps it arises out of a reluctance to put doctors in the role of taking life simply as a means of advancing patient self-determination, quite apart from any medical reasons for doing so.

The most likely reason for resistance to a pure self-determination standard is that we have, traditionally, defined the appropriate role of the physician as someone whose duty it is to relieve suffering. It has thus been customary, even among those pressing for euthanasia, to hang on to some part of the physician's traditional role. That is why a mere claim of self-determination is not enough. A doctor will not cut off my healthy arm simply because I decide my autonomy and well-being would thereby be enhanced. But the additional requirement that the physician also be relieving suffering carries with it the problem mentioned above. How can a physician determine, much less diagnose in any traditional medical sense, genuine and unrelievable suffering?



The doctor will not be able to use a medical standard. He or she will only be able to use a moral standard. Faced with a patient reporting great suffering, a doctor cannot, therefore, justify euthanasia on purely medical grounds (because suffering is unmeasurable and scientifically undiagnosable). To maintain professional and personal integrity, the doctor will have to justify it on his or her own moral grounds. The doctor must believe that a life of subjectively experienced intense suffering is not worth living. He must believe that himself if he is to be justified in taking the decisive and ultimate step of killing the patient; it must be his moral reason to act, not the patient's reason (even though they may coincide). But if he believes that a life of some forms of suffering is not worth living, then how can he deny the same relief to a person who cannot request it, or who requests it but whose competence is in doubt? This is simply a different way of making the point that there is no self-evident reason why the supposed duty to relieve suffering must be limited to competent patients claiming self-determination. Or why patients who claim death as their right under self-determination must be either suffering or dying.

There is, moreover, the possibility that what begins as a right of doctors to kill under specified conditions will soon become a duty to kill. On what grounds could a doctor deny a request by a competent person for euthanasia? It will not do, I think, just to specify that no doctor should be required to do that which violates her conscience. As commonly articulated, the argument about why a doctor has a right to perform euthanasia—the dual duty to respect patient self-determination and to relieve suffering—is said to be central to the vocation of being a doctor. Why should duties as weighty as those be set aside on the grounds of "conscience" or "personal values"?

These puzzles make clear that the moral situation is radically changed once our self-determination requires the participation and assistance of a doctor. It is then that doctor's moral life, that doctor's integrity, that is also and no less encompassed in the act of euthanasia. What, we might then ask, should be the appropriate moral standards for a person asked to kill another? What are the appropriate virtues and sensitivities of such a person? How should that person think of his or her own life and find,

within that life, a place for the killing of another person? The language of a presumed right of someone to kill another to relieve suffering obscures questions of that kind.

I can imagine counter-arguments. Is not our duty to relieve suffering sufficiently strong to justify running some risks? Why should we be intimidated by the dangers in a decisive relief of suffering? Is not the present situation, where death can be slow, painful, and full of suffering, already a clear and present danger?

Our duty to relieve suffering cannot justify the introduction of new evils into society. The risk of doing just that in the legalization of "aid-in-dying" is too great, particularly since the number of people whose pain and suffering could not be relieved would never be a large one (so even most euthanasia advocates recognize). It is too great because it would take a disproportionate social change to bring it about, one whose implications extend far beyond the sick and dying. It is too great because, as the history of the twentieth century should demonstrate, killing is a contagious disease, not easy to stop once unleashed in society. It is too great a risk because it would offer medicine too convenient a way out of its hardest cases, those where there is ample room for further, more benign reforms. We are far from exhausting the known remedies for the relief of pain (frequently, even routinely, underused), and a long way from providing decent psychological support for those who suffer from despair and a sense of futility in continuing life.

Pain and suffering in the critically ill and dying are great evils. The attempt to relieve them by the introduction of euthanasia and assisted suicide is even greater. Those practices threaten the future security of the living. They no less threaten the dying themselves. Once a society allows one person to take the life of another based on their mutual private standards of a life worth living, there can be no safe or sure way to contain the deadly virus thus introduced. It will go where it will thereafter. □

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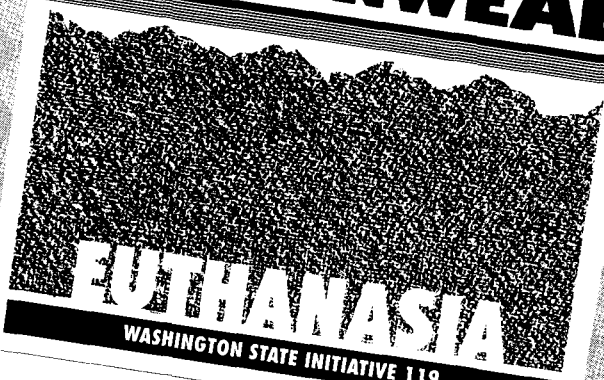
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AN ANCIENT & THRIVING PRACTICE

JO MCGOWAN

When we named our adopted daughter Moy Moy, we only meant to name her after my adopted sister, who is Chinese. The name means “little sister” in Cantonese, and since she was the youngest of our three, it seemed perfect.

Later, however, my husband (who is from India where we have lived for the past ten years) remembered something. In Punjabi, his mother tongue, the word “mui” is the feminine for “dying one.” Mui Mui is exactly the way many Indians pronounce Moy Moy and Ravi’s older relatives kept wondering aloud why we had chosen such an inauspicious name for our daughter.

I dismissed this as unfortunate but coincidental. It's the Cantonese meaning that matters, I insisted. After all, she's named after my Chinese sister.

But recently, I learned a bit more about the Chinese word which made me realize that China and India are not all that far apart. Indeed, they are separated only by the Himalayas, where Moy Moy (coincidentally or not) is from.

What I learned concerned the Chinese name Mei-Mei, which is often given to a girl child saved from an early death. Mei-Mei, Mui-Mui. Little girls dying or saved from the grave. But Moy Moy still meant “little sister,” I assured myself.

Then I read *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, a novel about Chinese-Americans in San Francisco. One of the main characters is called Mei-Mei; the name, the author explains, means “little sister.”

Suddenly, the whole thing became clear to me. Both in India and China, “little sister” and “girl saved from an early death” could very easily be the same thing; “little sister” and “little girl dying” even more so.

In both countries, female infanticide is an ancient and, in many areas, still thriving practice. In China, according to Stephen Mosher, director of the Asian Studies Center at California's Claremont Institute, as late as 1980, village midwives were often instructed to "draw a bucket of water when a woman went into labor. If the newborn had the misfortune to be a girl, she was *plunged into the bucket before she had a chance to draw her first breath.*"

Although the international demographic norm for the boy-girl ratio is 106 boys to 100 girls, in China's 1981 census, the

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numbers were 108.5 to 100. That translates into 232,000 missing baby girls. In 1982, the number of boys climbed to 109 and in 1983 to 111. According to the 1990 census, little has changed. The *New York Times* reported in June that perhaps 5 percent of all infant girls born in China are unaccounted for.

Until 1986, China's one-child policy was strictly enforced, putting many poor parents in the hideous position of weighing their own survival against their daughter's. To the Chinese peasant, the only social security system is the rearing of a productive son. With him to support them in their old age, they can look forward to a relatively peaceful retirement. A daughter, on the other hand, must be married off at great expense, at which point her financial contributions to her parents cease. A couple who chooses to bring up a girl as their only child is either financially independent, mad, or highly principled. Most of the desperate peasants of China are none of these and many of them, apparently, kill their daughters.

Finally, in 1986, the Chinese government, due in part to international censure, relented somewhat. Couples with "real difficulties" (i.e., a girl child) could apply for permission to try again.

The second time around, then, the stakes would be obviously even higher, the chances of a second daughter surviving very slight. Just as, by the bizarre mores at work in America today, a pregnant woman is assumed to have considered her "options," to have weighed and rejected abortion, so a Chinese woman bringing up a second daughter can be assumed to have considered and rejected infanticide. The name Moy Moy or Mei Mei, with



both its meanings, is frighteningly appropriate: to be a little sister means to have been saved from an early death. In India, the situation is no less grim. Although female infanticide was outlawed by the British in 1870, the practice continues. In one South Indian district, according to the news magazine *India Today* in its cover story "Born to Die" (June 1986), an estimated 6,000 baby girls had been poisoned to death in the preceding ten years.

Wealthy women have their own, more acceptable way of dealing with unwanted baby girls: amniocentesis and abortion. Although amniocentesis is now banned for sex-selection, in most cities it is still possible (often easy) to find a "doctor" willing to provide the service. In Elisabeth Bumiller's book *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey Among the Women of India*, one poor woman who had poisoned her daughter drew the obvious parallel between her action and those of wealthier women: "Abortion is costly....And you have to rest at home. So instead of spending money and losing income, we prefer to deliver the child and kill it."

The starkness of her words shocked Ms. Bumiller, who wondered whether this woman could possibly believe there was no difference between abortion and infanticide. But perhaps the realities of poverty enabled her a clearer vision than is generally afforded to the privileged elite who are so fond of subtle nuances. As another woman she interviewed put it, "Abortion at the fourth month is legally accepted in India. Instead of killing the child in the womb, I killed the child when it was born. If that is accepted, why can't I do this?"

Whatever the merits of her argument, it was clear that the motives of the poor woman were at least purer than those of her well-off sister, who could, after all, afford the dowry a daughter would require. According to Bumiller, the reason the business class went in for sex-selective abortion was simply to "avoid the social embarrassment of having daughters but no sons."

For the poor woman, things were more basic. "Suppose she had lived?" one asked Bumiller. "It was better to save her from a lifetime of suffering."

A lifetime of suffering. Mui-Mui: little girl dying. In India, studies have consistently shown that to be a female is to be at risk. In most families, the men and the boys eat first; the girls and the women get what is left. Boy babies are taken to the doctor early on in any illness; girls are allowed to languish for as long as possible. Girl babies die more than boy babies, in spite of long-standing medical evidence that the female is the stronger sex. Couples will go on producing girl after girl in a desperate attempt to get a son. When and if he finally appears, he is as precious as gold, while his sisters are less than sand.

When we lived in Delhi, a poor man of our acquaintance came one day to ask us the name of a good doctor for his ailing son. He wanted the best, he said, and cost was no object. "I have more daughters than I can count," he said, "but only one son."

We have only one Moy Moy and I thank God that this little sister was saved from her early death. She was the fourteenth child of a mountain woman who had been sterilized after her thirteenth pregnancy. Somehow, this determined baby broke through fate and technology and was conceived. Her mother then decided on an abortion, but was persuaded by her obstetrician

to carry on to term and give the baby up for adoption. Several weeks later, she was born on the side of a road, twelve weeks premature, weighing in at two pounds. The hospital her parents left her in did not even have an incubator, but Moy Moy survived, flourished, and blossoms today, eighteen months later.

Although I suppose it isn't fair, it is tempting to think of this child as one who has been sent, someone with a mission and a preordained role. I like to imagine her growing up, no longer Moy Moy, but Didi—the Hindi for elder sister—helping in some way to save the little girls whose small bodies—aborted, poisoned, starved, neglected, or worked to death—stand as evidence of how far we have to travel. □

MEDIA

THE GAMES WE PLAY

DATA INTO DOLLARS

My wife and I were having a quarrel about who was the most important figure in the early history of rock 'n' roll: she said Chuck Berry, I said Elvis. So I took the question to Rocky, our archetypically gruff/wise neighborhood bartender. Without missing a beat or raising his eyes as he mixed a perfect perfect Rob Roy, Rocky said: "Dick Clark." That's Dick Clark of "American Bandstand." I sat, stunned at the illumination.

Which brings me to TV game shows. Like rock, like the movies—indeed, like almost all distinctively twentieth-century art—TV is art only to the extent that it is also mass commodity: a producer's more than a performer's art. (As in: Why did Elvis, amazingly, never perform outside the U.S.? "Because his manager, 'Col.' Tom Parker, was a Dutch citizen without passport, and was afraid they might not let him back in.")

So, from the inception of network TV in the late forties and through the fifties, canny men like Mark Goodson and Bill Todman, Jack Barry, Merv Griffin, and our boy Dick Clark developed and perfected the game show. And though its ancestry goes back to the days of radio, perhaps no variety of TV is more quintessentially TV than this apparently simple, surprisingly complex little life-form.

In the first place, it meets two optimal requirements for mass art: it's cheap and it fills a time slot. For the price of a simple, reusable set and some prizes donated—free advertising—by name brands, you've got yourself a half-hour of signal (Dead Air, as Dan Rather will tell you, being the Sin for Which There Is No Forgiveness).

But you've got more: a perfect little parable of the Tube's morganatic marriage to the idea of "democracy." In radio days, a lot of game shows featured panels of "experts" answering questions submitted by listeners, e.g., "Information, Please." Some early TV shows—preeminently, of course, "What's My Line?"—followed the expert/celeb format; but as Marshall

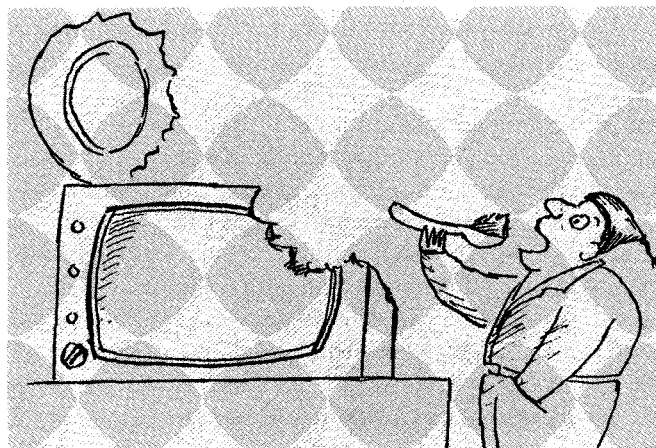
McLuhan told us long ago, where radio is aristocratic, the Tube is, let's say, populist. It's not a disembodied, authoritative voice from nowhere, it's the ghostly but instantaneous presence of "real people" (remember the ABC show of that name) in your den. It's democratic, at least, in that it tends to render the high and the mighty familiar, and make the familiar dramatic. We watch "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" to see our demigods with their halos off, and we watch "Roseanne" or "thirtysomething" to see our own slob's life presented as—dangerous word—significant. Dig: FDR would have looked pompous on TV, just as George Bush would have sounded even wimpier on radio.

So, as Goodson, Todman, Griffin, et al. discovered, the game show works best on TV when it features folks just like us or maybe, even, just a little dumber than us. You know the classic intro: "Here's our first contestant, Mrs. Charles Bovary, a welder and ballet dancer from Winesburg, Ohio, who has so far won..." And the high drama—I'm not kidding here, I'm an addict, too—is watching Mrs. Bovary, one of us, face up to the one Ultimate Challenge that still reappears in the anxiety-dreams of almost all adult Americans: the Final Exam.

Because, when you break it all down, that's the mythic core of the game show: the final exam, the spelling bee, the piano recital, whatever performance you remember that they made you do to get your diploma and prove you were one of them. Now sociologists from the great Max Weber to Michel Foucault have told us that the games a culture privileges are a good indication of the kind of behavior and values the culture wants to inculcate. "Play" is always both free and directed, that is: everybody gets to (or has to) play, but the rules and goal are determined by the game itself, a metaphor for the society that fosters the game—or, as Foucault would have said, a subtle "inscription of power."

Think about the wave of indignation that swept the country in the late fifties when it came out that contestants on the really big money shows—"Twenty-One," "The \$64,000 Question," etc.—had been coached on the answers by the producers (yeah—I'm old enough to remember that). The outrage—and it got all the way to the Senate floor—was directed not so much at the contestants who had "cheated," but at the producers. (That good man, Jack Barry, was the goat who took the fall for everybody else.) Rightly so: it was finding out that the croupier had loaded the dice, or that the headmaster had jacked the exam. It was the same nauseated discovery, in leisure time, that Watergate—and Iranscam and, let's face it, Desert Storm—were to be in political, "real" time. Damn, man! What if the umpires are crooks? An "inscription of power," a playtime promulgation of what a society thinks is right thinking, has to be anonymous: otherwise people will stop playing. Once the control-room curtain is drawn, Oz ceases to function as a wizard.

So what are the inscriptions that the game show incarnates? Well, look: only two board games have taken America by storm in this century, Monopoly in the Hoover/Roosevelt years and, fifty years later, Trivial Pursuit in the Age of Reagan. And that is the history of our values, if you look closely. You win at Monopoly by moving around the board to make a lot of money:



funny money, sure, but as we Masterchargers all know, that's the only kind there is. Trivial Pursuit, though, you win by retrieving information so that you can move around the board. Pursuit is the brilliant, bang-on late capitalist transformation of Monopoly just because it knows that money is no longer our basic medium of exchange or "getting ahead," but that information is.

So with the two dominant game shows on the Tube now—both Merv Griffin products, by the way—"Wheel of Fortune" and "Jeopardy." "Wheel" is played for prizes, "Jeopardy" for cash. But both are really played for success at information retrieval. You win at "Wheel" by completing a phrase before Vanna White has turned all its letters: it's a kind of crossword puzzle spiced with avarice, and it's a trifle old-fashioned, since you can lose your turn at play by coming up "Bankrupt" on a spin of the giant roulette wheel that is the set's main feature. "Jeopardy" is—sorry, Vanna—much more fun because it's a game of almost pure information, which is to say almost meaningless information. As in Trivial Pursuit, it's instant retrieval, not understanding, that makes you champ.

The old, and maybe romantic, formula is that preliterate societies value wisdom, literate ones value knowledge, and electromagnetic cultures value data. At the level of national survival, this is how you get the computerized number-worship that can ignore human suffering while calling itself, without irony, "economics." At the level of what we usually call "culture," it's how you get what the pseudo-hip critics now term "postmodernism": the jumble of styles and traditions whose main statement is the equivalence of all values as mere *fin de siècle* bric-a-brac. And at the level of mass art, it's how you get "Jeopardy," more "post-modern" by half than any opera Philip Glass or any poem John Ashbery ever perpetrated.

Consider the categories of questions that can appear on the big board in a typical game: "China," "Shakespeare," "British History," "Musicals," "Baseball," "'C' in Chemistry," with questions ranked by dollar value in order of increasing difficulty. The game, in other words, tests your ability to recognize what "facts" are really important, importance being calibrated as exchange value of the data. Seriously: even Thomas Pynchon couldn't have invented a better metaphor for our era, where the burden of the past has become the on/off storage and retrieval capability of the Lord, the Mainframe.

And you can't not watch the damn show: it connects that intimately with what we really think "winning" is all about, these days. I hope you've seen *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, one of the most important films of the last decade. In it, Bill and Ted, two heavy-metaledd-out California high school students, pass their history final not by learning anything, but by using a time machine to bring Socrates, Genghis Khan, Billy the Kid, Joan of Arc, Freud, Napoleon, and Abraham Lincoln back to their school auditorium to put on a show. Bill and Ted pass—happy ending—as preternaturally dumb as they were at the beginning. But they've, literally and figuratively, retrieved the past, and that's good enough. Because in the era of data, history is showbiz, and if you're fast enough on the synapses, the world is your postindustrial playground. But you've got to be real fast: fast enough, say, to be able to forget what lies on the other side of the playground's fence. And that may be, not the market value of information as an end in itself, but its real cost.

FRANK McCONNELL

STAGE

PUBLIC DISMISSAL CONGDON'S 'CASANOVA'

Joseph Papp's Public Theater has always kept its own counsel about such matters as official opening nights of its productions, playing previews to the Public regulars until a work is as ready as it is likely to get. Then the press is invited and the production settles in for its—sometimes brief—run. This season, however, that "brief" has often become minuscule. David Greenspan's *Dead Mother* and his production of *The Way of the World* came and went so quickly that, being a critic who has to juggle schedules in two cities, I never got to them at all; I did get in for one of the last performances of Tony Kushner's *A Bright Room Called Day*, but I kept expecting someone to start dismantling the set before the play was over. The champion of the quick close, however, was Constance Congdon's *Casanova*, which finished the week it opened. That is not an unusual phenomenon on Broadway, where tight budgets quickly disintegrate in the face of bad notices, but the Public has traditionally been a place in which unusual and difficult plays have been put on stage and left there long enough for their audiences to find them. The Public is presumably having money problems (*A Chorus Line* could not keep it afloat forever), but that does not soften the feeling that Papp was simply waiting to find out whether or not *Casanova* was going to get the Frank Rich seal of approval (of course, it didn't) before he pulled the rug out from under Congdon's play. This paragraph is intended not as a sermon but as a lament from a playgoer who has gone to the Public as often as possible since that first season (1967-1968), when *Hair* and *Hamlet* and Havel indicated the range and the ambition of the new venture. And a lament, too, for those people who did not get to see *Casanova*.

Despite the almost unanimous dismissal of Congdon's play by the reviewers, *Casanova* was (and presumably will continue to be in other productions, other towns) a rich and complex work, now biting satiric, now lyric, now almost slapstick. Congdon has never made it easy for her audiences. There is the matter of tone. A disgruntled playgoer walked out of the Philadelphia Drama Guild production of *Tales of the Lost Formicans*, complaining that Congdon was making a joke of Alzheimer's disease—this in the face of a superb performance by Alan Mixon as the disoriented father. There is the matter of focus. The shifts and the overlapping in *No Mercy*, Congdon's play about the making of the atom bomb, demand complete attention on the page (the only place I have seen it) if one is to be aware of the relationships among images; how much more demanding it must be in production. So it is with *Casanova*, where scenes chase one another off stage, the actors quick-changing for their multiple roles as though vaudeville were reborn; where a joke—maybe crude, maybe corny—will be swallowed by a cry of pain; where a direct or implied criticism of masculine power (some reviewers saw the play as a doctrinaire feminist statement) runs up against scenes of female complicity in male dominance. Therese, *Casanova*'s neglected wife, comes back from the dead to act as a kind of presenter—pulling curtains, making announcements—who will lead the audience through *Casanova*'s life, an infecting female point of view undercutting the male voice that sounds in the famous *History of My Life*. As the play progresses, however, it is obvious that she is there as lover as well as accuser.

Casanova is played by two actors. At the Public, the conventionally handsome Ethan Hawke was the young *Casanova*, the slightly pudgy John Seitz the mature and the old *Casanova*. The casting of Seitz—his ability as an actor aside—underscored the fact that sexuality is more than profile deep and—particularly in the case of *Casanova*—that the appeal of reputation is as strong as visual impression. Both *Casanovas* are often on stage at the same time, watching one another in action. The old man glories in the young man's sexual triumphs, urging him on; the young man is horrified as he watches his older self in scenes which illustrate the cruelty, the violence, the manipulation that sex can be—the penis as instrument to power, to money, to a mechanical keeping of score. A joyful sex scene like the one in which young *Casanova* and the girl romp in the garden is colored not only retroactively by what the young man and we see later of his older self, but by the scene that immediately follows in which the young man becomes part of a sexual smorgasbord that destroys the girl's innocence.

The other two main characters are Sophie, *Casanova*'s daughter, and the transvestite Bobo (impressively played by Jeff Weiss at the Public), who—as M. Elizabeth Osborn, dramaturge on the production, said in *TheaterWeek* (June 3-9, 1991)—“is at once mother, father, and companion to Sophie.” Sophie is pre-occupied with *Casanova*, who has always ignored her, and at the point where she seems to have reached a stand-off with her obsession, she welcomes the return of a lover who, over her pleas, once again walks away from her bed—as her father would have. Bobo is *Casanova* in reverse—both absorbed with their

sexual roles—and in the final ball scene they waltz together, artificial figures in a world that no longer has room for them. Blood gushes from Casanova's crotch, spreading across his white costume, a startling image that recalls the nosebleeds of Casanova as boy which his Grandmama sees as a promise of sexual prowess. Now a promise of death.

You have to watch that Constance Congdon.

GERALD WEALES

SCREEN

IGNORANTS ABROAD

'ROBIN' & 'IMPROMPTU'

When *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves* sticks to high jinks and stunts, it entertains. I enjoyed the flaming arrows whizzing by like meteors, the tree-to-tree vine-swinging, the cudgel bout between Robin and Little John that starts out per tradition on a footbridge but is soon extended into a sort of white-water rafting contest without rafts, Alan Rickman's brilliant rendition of the Sheriff of Nottingham as the hapless but irrepressible coyote of the Road Runner cartoons, the use of Robin's treehouse as a sort of arboreal playboy's pad where he woos Maid Marian, the catapulting of Robin and his Saracen sidekick over a high stone wall, and, indeed, everything else in this movie that is purely kinetic, swash-buckling, silly, childishy fearsome, or deliberately sophomoric. True, the grandiose special effects turn this version into something closer to a space opera than a medieval ballad, but, after all, the kids in the audience have been brought up not only on *Star Wars* and Indiana Jones but on preshow concession-counter trailers in which the soda sizzles like the unholy brew in a witch's caldron and the popcorn thuds into cavernous boxes with the audibility of dropped cannonballs. Alas, just as you can't uninvent the hydrogen bomb, you can't expect the latest generation of moviegoers to accept a modestly exciting Robin Hood.

But there are some elements in this version that are objectionable and others that are downright repulsive.

First, the merely objectionable: Michael Kamen's music, though not itself contemptible, is overused. Indeed, it never ceases. Every gesture, every nod of the head, every raise of an eyebrow is underscored by the flaring and swooning accompaniment. Was this musical battering an overcompensation for Kevin Costner's phlegmatic performance in the title role? His diction, bearing, and sense of character are all equally slack. True, the California space cadet dialogue doesn't help. "Did I injure you in another life, Will Scarlet, that you harbor such ill will against me?" Thus, Robin the Buddhist Zen archer to an unruly follower. But, playing opposite the well-spoken, beautiful, even formidable Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Costner seems so inadequate in every respect that his Robin Hood constantly threatens to turn into Robin Nerd.

Not quite repulsive but getting there: this is a politically correct Robin Hood that doesn't know what to do, dramatically, with its own raised consciousness. Azeen the Saracen returns with our hero from the Third Crusade so that the movie can be multicultural. But this device burdens the admirable Morgan Freeman with a character who, between bouts, can only stand around looking stiffly noble when he isn't rescuing babies with superb Caesarean surgery. The director, Kevin Reynolds, even cheats Freeman of his (potentially) most interesting moment: when King Richard, back from holy warring, puts in his traditional appearance at the end, the Islamic warrior recognizes his most hated enemy and oppressor while everybody else is dropping to knees in rapture. Just as Freeman seems about to develop his reaction into an interesting moment, Reynolds (or somebody on the producer's staff) cuts away.

Ditto the feminist treatment of Maid Marian. Initially portrayed as a lass who can buckle her swash with the best of the lads, she suddenly becomes helpless at the climax just so Costner can get to perform a conventionally heroic rescue. When the rather reedy Sheriff Rickman simply places the robust Ms. Mastrantonio under his arm like a football and runs with her, you may wonder what happened to the amazon who entered the film in full armor and nearly cleft Robin in half.

Which brings us to the truly repulsive: this movie, targeted primarily at children and adolescents, features not only hand-lapping, flaming arrows shot into foreheads, close-up batterings on faces and skulls, but, at length and fairly explicitly, an attempt by Nottingham to impregnate Marion by rape before Robin can rescue her. (He's trying to fulfill a prophecy about his heirs.) True, today's precocious kids might not be impressed by the traditional cliff-hanger in which the villain merely tries to marry the heroine before the hero arrives, but will you really feel comfortable letting your kids watch Alan Rickman dump Ms. Mastrantonio on the flagstones, throw her skirts over her head, force her legs apart (this last being played strictly for laughs), and strain over her supine form as she shrieks and kicks helplessly?

So there are the novel features of the new Robin Hood: multiculturalism, feminism, and gleeful sexual sadism. Why do the politically correct always end up being so brutal?

The James Lapine-Sarah Kernochan movie about George Sand's pursuit of Frederic Chopin, *Impromptu*, reminded me at best of fairly bright, arts-minded teen-agers putting on a charade in someone's back yard, a charade consisting of consciously half-baked, deliberately silly notions of how great artists of the nineteenth century lived and loved. And how did Chopin and Sand and Delacroix and Liszt live and love, according to the kids? Just like SoHo artists, heavy metal rockers, or drama department undergrads, only in frock coats and lace cuffs. When this movie is being unabashedly sophomoric, as when Chopin shouts, during a keyboard duet with Liszt, "Chromatic glissando!" to which Franz replies, "Yes! The wings of a butterfly!" then we must simply relax and enjoy the dumb fun. And occasionally the movie is better than that, as when Sand petitions her Polish

prey for but a minute of his time and he sullenly assents by playing the "Minute Waltz."

But too much of *Impromptu* is neither camp nor full-bodied drama, neither truly funny nor grippingly serious, but only the latest example of that form that is so dreadfully typical of our time: the cartoon that takes itself seriously, that seems to hug itself precisely because it does not probe, does not care about its own subject matter. Instead, its makers are content to goose the audience with name-dropping, deliberate but senseless use of anachronisms (Sand's children giving each other the high five, Musset wearing sunglasses), and the smirkiest possible portrayal of the sexual and social fuss with which artists live without a hint of the passions behind that fuss.

Thus, Bernadette Peters, as Liszt's harridan-mistress, is directed by Lapine to carry on like some drag-queen creation of Charles Ludlam's: screaming, pouting, pursing eyes and mouth, toting her suckling babes around like so many rag dolls. But what is the character flaw supposedly revealed or underlined by all this physical grotesquerie? At the end of the film, Liszt screams at Peters that she has murdered his vitality with guilt. But how has she done this? What sort of conception do Lapine and

Kernochan have of Liszt to think that his vitality of all vitalities could be smothered by a mistress or by anyone else?

And why is George Sand so clearly intended by the filmmakers to be the heroic opposite of Peters's character? Because the baby-bedecked, shrewish Peters is supposed to represent the man-dependent woman? While the trouser-wearing, cigar-smoking, successful novelist Sand is a progenitor of the liberated woman? It would seem so. But to give or withhold approval on the basis of whether your characters do or don't fit into current political/social movements is the mark of the propagandist, not the artist.

Who could ever have predicted that a film about Chopin and his friends could have anything in common with a Robin Hood movie? Yet there is a connection. Both films are examples of American provinciality. Both are lamed by a radical inability to imagine the European past as a place that is truly different from the American present. The time machines of these American filmmakers whirl and spin and hum, colored lights flicker on and off, a mighty noise is made. But whether the dials have been set for 1181, England, or 1840, Paris, the results are the same. We gaze out of the machine only to find ourselves stuck in la-la land.

RICHARD ALLEVA

BOOKS

Love, hatred, pity, anger

When Jean-Jacques Rousseau, polemicist and provocateur of the first rank, threw down his gauntlet to challenge the Enlightenment philosophes' rather lofty opinion of themselves and the power of reason in general, his gesture was decisive and gained force through repetition: "Regardless of what the Moralists may say about it, human understanding owes much to the Passions which, as is commonly admitted, also owe much to it..." Or: "Man's first language, the most universal, the most energetic and the only language he needed before it was necessary to persuade assembled men, is the cry of Nature." Rousseau spoke, he said, of "Pity, a disposition suited to beings as weak and as subject to so many ills as we are; a virtue all the more universal and useful to man as it precedes the exercise of all reflection in him, and so Natural that the Beasts themselves sometimes show evident signs of

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

Reason and Emotion in Moral
Decision Making
Sidney Callahan
HarperCollins, \$22.95, 250 pp.

Jean Bethke Elshtain

it. To say nothing of the tenderness Mothers feel for their young and of the dangers they brave in order to protect them, one daily sees the repugnance of Horses to trample a living Body underfoot; an animal never goes past a dead animal of its own Species without some restlessness: Some even give them a kind of burial; and the mournful lowing of Cattle entering a Slaughter-House conveys their impression of the horrible sight that strikes them."

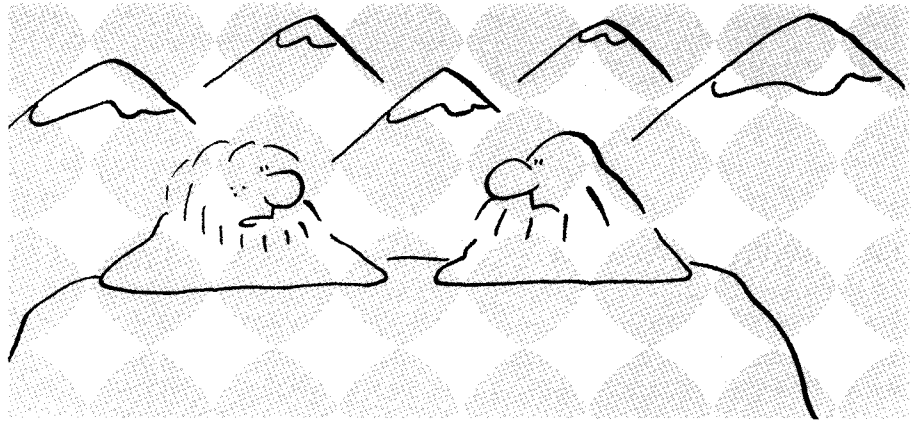
Love, hatred, pity, anger—this is the first vocabulary of emotions, and of moral reasoning, according to Rousseau. In this he may be indebted to the great Augustine,

though he did not acknowledge the indebtedness, for Augustine, too, spoke of a natural morality, written in human hearts, and basic to the entire sentient human race—a category he celebrated as including the Sciopodes, who shelter themselves from the sun in the shade of one foot, and the Cynocephali, who had dogs' heads and barked. The world is wondrous indeed. There are more things than are dreamt of in the works of most moral philosophers, at least those of a harshly rationalist or cognitivist bent.

Sidney Callahan, a professor of psychology at Mercy College, and a sensitive observer of the perils and possibilities of our times, seems to me more in an Augustinian or Rousseauian vein than she herself might acknowledge. She, with Rousseau, would start with feeling. She gives the rationalists their due but not, thank goodness, the day. For theirs—and Callahan is more generous in her assessments than am I, perhaps—is too often a cheese-paring approach to moral problems. It seems to

work like this: I isolate moral problem x; figure out what factors and features are at work and elaborate and fine tune these; then I come up with solution y or maybe z. (Modesty may forbid adumbrating a *single* solution, although the ambition tends in this direction.) Callahan understands that deep moral quandaries do not yield their secrets to narrowly cognitivist or “cost-benefit” accounts. She is right to signal the way in which “modern moralists’ suspicions of emotion are based upon a particular psychological model of human functioning that has not changed much over the past centuries. There is an assumption, first, that reasoning *can* be thoroughly detached from emotion; second, that only detached reasoning will be reliably objective; and third, that emotions will only bias, cloud, and impede moral decision making. Recent psychological approaches to reason, emotion, and their interactions cast doubt on these presuppositions.” To say the least.

Callahan begins by noting that one of the marks in a decline of a working moral consensus in American society is more and more frantic attention to ethics, especially bioethics. New technology, especially reproductive and genetic technology, throws up problems faster than an ethicist can say, “Thou shalt not....” But most ethicists refuse to utter the N-word (“No”). That seems too much a relic of a moral or moralistic past, a world of authority and command. It is no doubt to the good, if not *all* to the good, that we no longer “do” or “do not” based solely upon the force of habit or tradition. But the alternatives that beckon for our attention and allegiance are often deeply flawed. Callahan counters an exclusively or narrowly rationalist “solution” with a more complex picture of “the self as moral agent. I try to give a picture that takes into account new psychological understandings of self-emotion, reason, intuition, problem solving, and developmental change.” Two big words in Callahan’s vocabulary are “synthesis” and “integration.” By “synthesis” she gestures toward a drawing-together of features of moral activity often isolated into what gets studied by moral philosophers, on the one hand, or psychologists, on the other. By “integration” she refers to a notion of the whole or integrated self, a self more or less at one with itself. Conscience, she insists,



“I was sick yesterday: can I borrow your enlightenment notes?”

is “holistic,” at one and the same time “thinking, feeling, and willing.”

Callahan’s concentration or moral self-commitment is welcome in this era of talk about incessantly self-displacing selves. But I wonder if her ideal of wholeness or full integration of the morally acting, feeling, and willing self may not be just a bit too grand. My hunch is that when we act, or *whenever* we act in a morally complex situation, we are always beings at odds with ourselves. At that moment the willing may triumph over the nilling (to borrow some Augustinian language) but we are, I suspect, less integrated and whole than determined that, on balance, this course of action is right. Callahan insists that only in “severe disorders does the ‘I’ of the self lose its sense of ownership and unity....” Surely, however, facing the moral dilemma of abortion, the woman who proclaims full and complete ownership of her body and an at-oneness with the proprietary view of the self this proclamation endorses, would be a woman in the process of radically simplifying the moral universe. That is, in order to preserve complete “ownership and unity” she strips the moral universe of a complexity that is simply and irrevocably *there*. Callahan, clearly, agrees with me on this point. For this reason, her commitment to the language of holism and integration may not quite serve her own supple purposes. Better, I should think, to go with St. Paul—that which I would I do not; that which I would not, that I do—or, at least, to accept this as one prominent feature of my moral life, than to push for too strong a picture of integration and moral harmony. “Wholehearted emotional commitment to the good and right” may be too

much to expect from us mere mortals, particularly in this day and age, in this time and place.

Make no mistake, by the way: Callahan pushes her own version of reason, a far more discursive and dialogic model than that endorsed by most of the makers of ethical systems. But she also, refreshingly, insists that love “is the great moral educator because it makes us pay attention to and value what we love.” Here she might have spent a bit more time drawing on the good Dr. Freud who insisted that the child’s helplessness is the initiator of all moral motive. Despite his own scientizing moments, Freud is a great teacher of what the terrible human cost is when human beings are not deeply and irrevocably loved.

My criticisms of the book are rather simply cast. Callahan’s text is primarily expository. She spends quite a bit of time clearing debris. I wanted her to wallow in the muck just a bit more, to dirty her hands with some really nasty and tawdry situations and to show us how her approach would confront real life messiness in a way that those she criticizes do not or cannot. As well, I am not at all certain that we can will ourselves to be good and to do right as she rather optimistically insists. Her insistency is too abstractly cast. I can be a selfish moral monster in one situation; a decent friend and neighbor in another. None of us knows what he will do on the morrow, said Augustine, and I fear he was right. I also think we shrink from this mordant awareness. But I am certain, as well, that Callahan is right to insist that children deprived of loving, nurture, and care in their earliest years are placed in the danger zone—for their own sakes, and ours.

FIND GOD & REPORT BACK

THE SEARCH FOR GOD AT HARVARD

Ari L. Goldman

Times Books, \$20, 283 pp.

Robert Ellsberg

Ari Goldman begins his book with a Talmudic parable: "Four went down to the orchard. One fell gravely ill and died, one became a heretic, one went mad, and one, Rabbi Akiba, emerged whole."

Goldman, a religion writer for the *New York Times* and—of the utmost importance to his story—an Orthodox Jew, received the support of his newspaper to undertake a year's study at the prestigious Harvard Divinity School. That he begins his account of that year on such a portentous note immediately suggests that this is not to be a simple journalistic account of life at the divinity school. The orchard, in this case, is the perilous world of interreligious dialogue. And the challenge that Goldman confronts is not whether one may emerge from the orchard with faith intact—conversion in his case presents no serious temptation—but whether there is not the potential for a greater wholeness, a richness to be found in the encounter with other faiths.

The book shifts—at times wobbles—between several purposes. On one level Goldman offers an engaging portrait of life at an Ivy League seminary. The author's back-to-school enthusiasm and relish of the experience prevent him from pursuing the tough journalist's questions he would normally bring to an assignment. He also provides us with a summary of what he learned in class. Successive chapters guide us through the world's major religions. The presentation here is engaging and sympathetic, if occasionally simplistic. However, it is the autobiographical story, woven throughout, that provides the heart of the book, and by far its most interesting part.

Goldman was raised in the relatively insulated and conservative world of Orthodox Judaism. Caught as a child between battling parents, he learned to cling to his faith as an oasis of stability. With detachment and tenderness, he describes the years of his childhood, poring over the Talmud under the strict supervision of the rabbis. But alongside his love of Judaism there arose another passion, for journalism, fostered during long subway rides to the yeshiva, as he pored over discarded newspapers.

The struggle to reconcile these two identities—as a Sabbath-observant Jew and a professional journalist—is the tension in his life and it provides the underlying theme of his book. He is pursued all the way to Harvard by the shade of Rabbi Siegel, the external superego of his youth, who tugs at his sleeve and taunts him with warnings about the temptations abounding in the gentile world. In a modest way, Goldman invests his struggle with a kind of nobility. Such seemingly casuistical questions as whether it is a violation of the Sabbath to take notes with a pencil become symbolic trials by ordeal in the strenuous effort to remain faithful in the secular world.

As for the divinity school, Goldman's account is largely tied to the classes he took, the more or less sympathetic professors and students he encountered, and the evident pleasure he experienced in the almost delicious indolence of student life. "It was like reading the *New York Review of Books* and knowing that you would have the time to read each new book reviewed." The atmosphere of the school was not what he expected. Although the majority of the students were engaged in preparation for ministry, there was a marked diffidence about any expression of Christian faith. So strong was the respect for pluralism that Goldman found it difficult to get a sense of what Christians actually believe. At the same time he alludes to an atmosphere of ideological correctness—both theological and political—at odds with the apparent spirit

of tolerance. Goldman chooses not to pursue this seeming contradiction, however.

Instead, what leaves a far greater impression on the author is his immersion into the orchard of religious pluralism, especially through a course taught by Professor Diana Eck. Goldman had imagined that his knowledge of Judaism would provide an advantage in studying and writing about other religions. But Eck astounds him in the opening class with a sentence that comes to serve as motto for the book: "If you know one religion, you don't know any."

Eck's point is that the study of other religions does more than provide insight into the faith of others; from this study we are able to look at our own religion with new eyes, and emerge, not with some form of religious esperanto, but with renewed faith and deepened conviction. That, in the end, was Goldman's own experience.

He does not expire or go mad in the orchard. He is certainly not tempted to convert; indeed, he even finds himself fantasizing about becoming a rabbi. Yet emerge he must, with some regret, his year at the divinity school over, to return to a real job in the real world. Whether he emerges whole or a heretic lies in the eye of the beholder. He feels distaste for the increasingly right-wing turn of his coreligionists. He finds himself ostracized by members of his new Westchester synagogue for whom "the battles I had fought throughout my adult life to remain Orthodox were not seen as battles at all...but as compromises that diminished me in their eyes and somehow threatened the cozy world of the Orthodox."

The struggle continues. Ultimately, *The Search for God at Harvard* does not pretend to offer a report on the state of seminary education, the future of religion in America, or an introduction to world religions. One senses that it was written for Goldman's fellow Jews—for the members of his synagogue, for his family, his children, and even for Rabbi Siegel—to deliver the author's conclusion: "To my mind, Judaism is diminished if it is painted too narrowly.... I believe that traditional Judaism is large enough, compassionate enough, forgiving enough, and tolerant enough to encompass the world."

Substitute traditional Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or any other religion, and there is a profitable lesson for everyone.

CRITICAL MIND, STUBBORN HEART

SELECTED WRITINGS: 1950-1990

Irving Howe

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$34.95, 490 pp.

Lee Siegel

Irving Howe's writings continue to enact the tension between thinking and doing, cerebral play and social responsibility, that has been the public trial of the modern, urban-based intellectual; they approach literature as a consequential event, and analyze social and political events as if they deserved the attention of great literature. "My belief," Howe writes in the preface to this selection of his work, "is that it should be possible for a serious person to hold more than one interest, or one idea, at a time." The lightly ironic tone should not be necessary. No serious person reading these brilliant essays on literature, culture, politics, and society will fail to admire the range of Howe's interests and expertise, or to be moved by the impassioned judgments he expends on what he sees happening in the world before him.

To modify a famous term from T.S. Eliot, Jewish-American intellectuals have usually required an objectionable correlative. Howe himself dubbed the most influential generation of those—now mostly erstwhile—virtuosi of opposition the "New York Intellectuals," a loosely cohesive group that during the calamitous thirties began cutting its literary and polemical teeth. Like other New York intellectuals, Howe was nourished and instructed by political radicalism on the one hand and cultural modernism on the other; like most of them he at one point revised his enthusiasm for modernism's often antihuman energies; unlike all of them he has held courageously to a belief in a democratic radicalism. For if he has soured on heroic modernism, he has persisted in calling for a heroic antimodernism. Having rejected epistemological despair, he has retained

a marginal challenge to the status quo. Now that modernism's "terrible beauty," its shocks and its terrors, have been institutionalized as cultural norms, Howe seeks an avant-garde of decency, an adversarial humanity. Some people will only be saved by a certainty; reading Howe you feel that he hopes for the certainty and freedom of an ultimate contradiction.

As well as being a distinguished literary critic and social historian, Howe is coeditor of the quarterly journal *Dissent*. He is a committed democratic socialist, and the present volume is dedicated to the memory of Michael Harrington. A veteran of ideological wars, Howe is well aware that to make a political agenda humane, you have to welcome paradox and ambiguity, and that to assure its exclusive success you have to lock them out. His political writings wield abundant complexities, so much so that while asserting politically radical values he seems to be making sure that they remain inhospitable to arid theoretical interests. In the essay, "Why Has Socialism Failed in America?" he ruefully concludes that socialism had to fail here, and that verdict serves as a warning to anyone naive or callous enough to mire the whole enterprise in an abstract fervor; but socialism, he adds, did and does not have to fail in such a big way—and that is a comforting rebuke to anyone weak-hearted enough to be discouraged by Howe's own rational skepticism.

A certain sect of Jewish mystics believed that only after every conceivable sin had been committed would the Messiah appear to redeem the world, and they devoutly set about hastening his arrival. Howe will let stand no postulate about human nature or social policy until he has mined it for every nuance of fairness he can, until he has subjected it to all manner of analytic and emotional logic. His method might be subtle, vigilant, and fastidious, but his aim is simply expressed: to create a just society. During the Reagan administration's reign of apocalyptic optimism, Howe wrote in

a bristling essay included here: "Criticism and more criticism—that's the need of the moment, the need for tomorrow... Let people of determination, steady workers with some humor and no fanaticism, keep saying: 'This is not what America is supposed to be, this is not how human beings should live.'"

Howe's major preoccupations are well represented in this volume: literary essays on Faulkner, Pirandello, Dreiser, Frost, Zola, Dickens, and Solzhenitsyn, among others; appreciations of Jewish literary figures such as Sholom Aleichem, and of literary figures who happened to be Jewish, like Isaac Babel and Delmore Schwartz; pieces on Whittaker Chambers, Lillian Hellman and the McCarthy years, and the New Left; masterly cultural history in "The New York Intellectuals"; and seminal literary history in "The Idea of the Modern." There is an intriguing rumination on T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia), one of those intellectuals of action who, like Trotsky and Malraux, haunt one corner of Howe's imagination. And in "Writing and the Holocaust," Howe approaches the problem of applying critical standards to Holocaust literature—the argument is unique of its kind, so far as I know, and important to read.

The collection begins with a trenchantly dismissive essay on Louis-Ferdinand Céline, the French nihilist writer par excellence, and ends with a judiciously hopeful meditation on socialism and the future. The juxtaposition is a pointed one. If a theme circulates through these writings, it is Howe's characteristically complex belief that on one side, the nihilistic bleakness he sees as a still vibrant remnant of cultural modernism has to be chipped away at by people of good will, and on the other, that no conscientious modern person can pretend to be unmoved by nihilism's appeal.

For the Russian writers who inhabit another special corner of Howe's mind, pessimism has always sheltered hope from despair. For Howe, wise to the conditions of what is in the West an approximately reverse historical situation, optimism has to break its way through frozen seas of catastrophe before it may earn the right to persuade. It's the only kind of optimism you can be persuaded by.

To catastrophe, Howe is as sensitive in

literature as in life. "The first task of the novelist," he believes, "...is to create an imaginary social landscape both credible and significant." He favors the great realist writers, who reveal the flesh, blood, and bones of human travails, over the literary modernists, in whose work, "the problematic nature of experience tends to replace the experience of human nature." He is sometimes accused of a lack of sympathy for the modernist style. On the contrary: himself expert in using irony and paradox as critical strategies to liberate the human element from ideological dross, he has grown disillusioned with writers who employ the same strategies to liberate existence from the human element. Maybe that's why I have often found Howe's qualifications of modernism too illuminating of their subject to be entirely convincing arguments against it.

More effective as antimodernist statements are his intelligent and eloquent defenses of writers working in a traditional vein, such as his superb essays on Zola and Dreiser. If anything, his critique of Eliot and Yeats, Kafka and Lawrence et al. shows Howe's modernist roots in the way he overestimates the capacity of modernist imaginations to do harm. A bit of an anarchist himself, Howe would probably agree with the anarchist, social reformer, and proto-modernist Shelley, that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of at least a certain sector of humankind—unlike Shelley, he fears the consequences of some of their legislation. Thus, whereas some conservative and Marxist critics alike condemn the modernist writers as amoral aesthetes, Howe finds in them a moral vision he doesn't like. The difference in perspective underscores a difference in the breadth of critical reach. Yet I hope Howe would concede that the memory of an imaginative truth which was hostile on the page to ordinary experience might help independent spirits breathe when they are on the street. And as for the practical effects of modernists and their work, it was John F. Kennedy, not Hitler or Stalin, who enjoyed reading Malraux's "haughty authoritarianism," as Howe calls it; it was Malraux who fought against fascism in Spain and the Nazi armies in France, not Eliot or Yeats who took arms against democracy in Great Britain. That said, there exists an artistic

imagination and an ethical imagination, and Howe's explorations of the places where they conflict or converge are rare and gratifying occasions in American letters, and sometimes, fruitful provocations.

A last remark about Howe's literary presence. Familiar steps strike the ground with the weight of an unmistakable temperament; so it is when a genuine personality strikes words onto the page; so it has been with this immediately recognizable voice, which kindles reasonableness, idealism, and humane feeling in selfish times.

Howe has coined the term "style of brilliance" to characterize the "free-lance dash, peacock strut, daring hypothesis, knock-about synthesis" that flew from the pens of the New York writers. His own prose is robustly elegant, gracefully sober, swift and lucid, precisely anchored to the object of discrimination. It is a sort of honesty. The best virtue of the greatest critics is that they proceed under the power of their own minds. The fineness of Irving Howe is that in his writing a powerful critical mind draws its independence from an unabashedly stubborn heart. □

PICTURES OF BILL GRAY

MAO II

Don DeLillo

Viking, \$19.95, 256 pp.

Mark Feeney

In Don DeLillo's previous novel, *Libra*, a CIA operative assigned to write the secret history of the Kennedy assassination comes to realize that "his subject is not politics or violent crime but men in small rooms." Those last four words accurately reflect DeLillo's tenth novel, *Mao II*.

Of course, men in small rooms have figured throughout DeLillo's fiction. He has crowded his books with solitaires: the math-prodigy hero of *Ratner's Star*, the reclusive rock-star hero of *Great Jones Street*, Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra*, even (briefly) Adolf Hitler immured in his Berlin bunker in *Running Dog*. Yet in no other DeLillo novel have so many of them filled so many rooms. *Mao II* is a book about writers, terrorists, and hostages—men *professionally* located in small rooms—chained to a typewriter, chained to a conspiracy, or chained literally. As against these singled-out individuals, there is the equally disturbing spectacle of identityless crowds (the book opens with the famous Moonie mass wedding in Yankee Stadium; later a character involved in the wedding finds

herself obsessed with the throngs of homeless in the East Village). Hyperconsciousness or the loss of self—these are the alternatives *Mao II* offers.

Narrative has never particularly engaged DeLillo, and the plot here is straightforward enough. The book's protagonist, Bill Gray, is an acclaimed novelist who takes intricate pains to preserve his anonymity. His old editor, a man named Charlie Everson, heads a human-rights group. Everson's organization has reached a tentative agreement with a terrorist group for the release of a young poet being held hostage in Beirut. The agreement is to be announced at a London news conference, and Everson has hit upon the media-pleasing idea of having Gray appear at the press event to read a selection of the hostage's poems. Hands across the water, the pen is mightier than the sword—and generous publicity for all concerned.

Gray surprises both men and agrees to Charlie's proposal. He's sixty-three, alternately dismissive of the novel he's been working on for twenty-three years, and terrified at the prospect of publishing it. Involving himself in Everson's project is a way of escape. It also feeds into his own growing misgivings with the writer's enterprise. "There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists," he muses. "In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and

influence....Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated."

That last sentence has an ironic cast. DeLillo himself is very much *unincorporated*. He doesn't teach, he doesn't tour. He just keeps adding to what is as impressive a body of fiction as any American novelist has produced over the past twenty years. Only Thomas Pynchon surpasses him as a master of what one might call the paranoid style in American fiction. (DeLillo, who greatly esteems Pynchon's work, has clearly drawn upon him for Bill Gray. Pynchon, in turn, has contributed one of his rare blurbs to *Mao II*. Even paranoids, it would seem, have mutual-admiration societies.)

DeLillo's fictional world is one charged with menace and meaning. In it, "everything" is "a shape, a fate, information flowing." For DeLillo, facts have auras, and Bill Gray is only half kidding when he complains, "Nothing happens until it's consumed.... Nature has given way to aura. A man cuts himself shaving and someone is signed up to write the biography of the cut. All the material in every life is channeled into the glow." In all DeLillo's books an almost medieval sense of immanence collides with a clinical delight in the amassing of data. The results have been mem-

orable, unsettling, and occasionally hilarious.

Some DeLillo novels have been very funny indeed (*End Zone*, *Great Jones Street*, *White Noise*), while in others laughter would have been very much an alien presence (*The Names*, *Libra*). *Mao II* belongs to the latter group. It's apocalyptic in a way none of his previous novels has been. Black humor enlivened *White Noise*'s "airborne toxic event"; and *Libra*, which took for its subject the one event America has come to regard as its own twentieth-century apocalypse, managed to conclude with a graveside epiphany from Marguerite Oswald. Yet from the packing-case shanties of Tompkins Square to the "millennial image mill" of Beirut, a desperate unease pervades *Mao II*; nothing mediates it. Even something as bright and familiar as Broadway feels "as if blocks of time and space had come loose and drifted. The misplaced heartland hotel. The signs for Mita, Midori, Kirin, Magno, Suntory—words that were part of some synthetic mass language, the esperanto of jet lag."

"Esperanto of jet lag" is the sort of brilliant phrase only Don DeLillo might come up with. *Mao II* has many such bravura observations. Ultimately, though, there's something hollow about the novel. One reads it with constant interest and excitement—excepting Pynchon, no other author sees the way we live now quite so compellingly as DeLillo does—but one also reads it with a growing sense of disappointment. The connection between terrorists and novelists never exists on other than a purely intellectual level; and even there, it remains little more than a powerful conceit. Endings have always been a problem for DeLillo, and *Mao II* concludes without ever really resolving—Bill's own fate becomes almost incidental. This is DeLillo's most personal novel; one detects an intimate feeling in the writing about Bill Gray and his vocation that is absent from DeLillo's other books. But that kinship carries with it a patness that trades more on our assumptions about novelists—or, rather, Great Novelists—than on what such a strange and terrible individual must actually be like. It takes a great novelist to render a Great Novelist. In *Mao II*, we get only the first half of the equation. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 450)

ings with housing code violations, HPD must target its efforts toward those buildings with the most serious problems and with the highest probability of success in the courts.

In mid-1989, when the tenants of 2645 Morris Avenue asked HPD to move for a 7A proceeding, 102 violations were listed against the building, not the "hundreds" stated in the article. While that number certainly indicates problems in the building, the typical building in which the courts impose 7A administrators literally do have hundreds of violations, in keeping with the legal requirement that this remedy be applied only on finding extreme and life-threatening situations.

HPD staff met with the tenants that September and reinspected the building (there was no "demonstration" as the article states). Then, since the condition of the building warranted it, HPD initiated a 7A proceeding, which started in December of 1989. The court granted the owner several adjournments, during which HPD conducted additional inspections, at one point finding nearly 300 violations in the building.

However, the owner corrected many of the violations by the time the 7A proceeding was finally scheduled for trial in June of 1990. HPD's inspection immediately prior to the court date showed that of the 172 violations to which the inspectors had access, 142, or 83 percent, had been corrected.

Given the high rate of correction, the only genuine legal remedy for HPD to pursue was a consent order to correct the remaining violations. We did not "drop" the case, as the article alleges; we assiduously pursued the legal remedies available to us under the law. We remained actively involved in monitoring the building, and when a reinspection in September 1990 showed that the owner was not adequately complying with the consent order, we restored the 7A case and the request for a 7A administrator and also requested that contempt penalties be levied against the owner.

As a result of HPD's motion, it was agreed that the decision whether to appoint

REVIEWERS

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a 7A administrator would be based on an inspection of the building by Judge Gilbert Badillo. The judge inspected the building in December 1990, and ultimately issued a written decision this past March declining to appoint an administrator. Instead, the judge issued a further order to correct and fined the owner \$1,000. The judge found that although "numerous violations did exist, these violations did not make the subject premises immediately hazardous."

The judge's decision did *not* mean that the matter was dropped. HPD is continuing to monitor the owner's obligation to correct the remaining violations pursuant to the court order. Since the building was recently sold, we intend to go back to court to formally ensure that the court order compelling repairs is applied to the new owner.

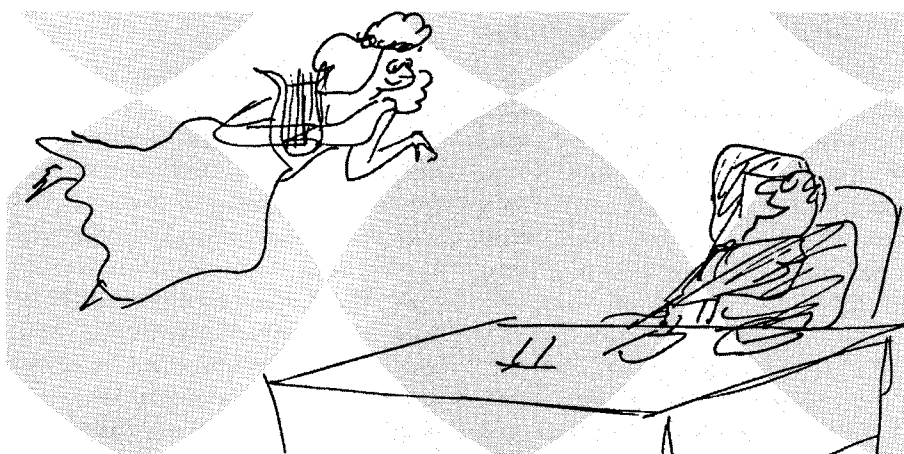
Given the legal context within which the decisions regarding the building were taken, the article's statement that "HPD chose either to ignore or to declare void the valid complaints of the tenants" is both untrue and unfair. HPD takes its obligations to protect tenants very seriously, as is witnessed in this instance by our request for a 7A administrator and our continuing monitoring of the owner's progress toward meeting his obligations.

Despite the seriousness of a 7A action, HPD is successful in using this remedy for irresponsible behavior by owners. The courts appoint 7A administrators on the recommendation of HPD for about fifty buildings each year of the roughly two hundred 7A cases that we bring. Currently, more than two hundred buildings in the city have 7A administrators.

Given a legal system that attempts to protect the rights of both owners and tenants, tenants will never be completely pleased with all legal remedies. Nevertheless, your author's characterization of HPD's role with 2645 Morris Avenue and with the 7A process in general is unfair. The facts are that HPD affirmatively moved for a 7A proceeding, followed up on all of the judge's decisions, and aggressively sought to compel the owner to remove the housing code violations.

FELICE MICHETTI

The writer is commissioner of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development.



"That's interesting. I didn't know there was a muse of real estate."

The author replies:

Commissioner Michetti is, I am sure, a reliable and sensitive public servant who encourages members of her staff to be persistent in demanding adequate housing for poor and lower-income people in New York City. Nonetheless, her own letter provides evidence that her agency is not up to the task—or that the system within which it works is in need of basic reforms that she should be pursuing. Even in her response to my article, she could have done more than she does to acknowledge the need for change.

Consider only the length of time between 1984—when the tenants of 2645 Morris Avenue first appealed to public authorities for help in making their building safe and otherwise habitable—and the date of my article (April 1991), when serious violations of the housing code were still present. Granted, HPD intervened in the case as requested, but not, it must be said, successfully. As I wrote: "Despite the good intentions of individuals, the system itself is unfair and unjust."

Ms. Michetti notes that a judge, not her department, appoints a 7A administrator when conditions are sufficiently dangerous. How many people have to get the flu or catch a cold before having no hot water becomes dangerous to one's health? Commissioner Michetti suggests that her employees were unable to argue persuasively for a 7A administrator because other buildings had even more problems. A judge should make a decision based on the law and on the case at hand, not on what happens in other, more dilapi-

dated buildings whose conditions are not before the court. Is the commissioner claiming that judges are venal, slothful, or biased? If so, she will serve the public by naming names. Are the statutes that judges must follow too lax and loophole-ridden, so that poor people can obtain redress only in extreme cases? If so, that situation needs to be put before the public and the legislature.

Even apart from basic reform, it can be argued that HPD needs new strategies to cope with its assignment, given the limited resources that Ms. Michetti correctly notes. Appreciative of the difficulties the commissioner daily faces, and that the agency will continue to face in view of budget problems, I suggest that HPD should not attempt to bring 7A cases against all buildings with serious code violations, nor should it restrict its suits to those with multiple serious violations. Rather, it should act vigorously against some buildings where violations are few in number but serious enough to endanger life, health, or safety. It should also bring suit against a few landlords who tolerate many serious violations. The point would be to send a message to all negligent landlords, whether they have few or many violations, that they risk losing control to a 7A administrator if they fail to act responsibly.

The commissioner acknowledges that a landlord who has only a hundred violations, some of which involve a lack of hot water, does not risk much. Ms. Michetti is intelligent and has an able staff. She should be able to devise a better strategy to protect low-income renters.

JOHN J. PIDERIT, S.J.

Tenants lost out

Bronx, N.Y.

To the Editors: I am a resident of the building described by John J. Piderit, S.J., in his article "Give Me Shelter," and secretary of its tenants' association. The article really captured the flavor of our ten-year effort to obtain basic services.

Unfortunately, no matter what we did or how hard we fought, we were unable to compel Nicholas Chimienti, our landlord, to give us hot water or repair our apartments. We went years with inadequate hot water; last year alone, thirty-seven heat and hot water violations were placed on the building.

The tenants were well enough organized to pressure the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to address our complaints, but while we could force the agency to do its job, we couldn't make them do it well. The managing attorney for that particular division of HPD informed us flat out that we were wasting his time, that conditions in the building were not that serious, that there was nothing wrong with the way we were living.

At HPD's request, several of us took off from work an average of twice a month for close to two years to go to housing court. There we would spend the day sitting in the hallways; on each occasion we would be sent home and told to come back again in another couple of weeks—when we would again spend all day sitting in the hallways. The HPD lawyers showed no concern that we were all missing time at work, nor did they make any effort to let us know what was going on with the case. The first time HPD paid any real attention to our building was when our landlord and building were featured in a newspaper article describing the ten worst landlords in New York City. There was another flurry of activity from the agency after the *Commonweal* article appeared.

Finally, the HPD lawyer decided to resolve things without a trial. It was agreed that the judge would decide the case on the basis of a single visit to the building, and that HPD would not appeal the decision—all this without the knowledge or consent of the tenants. There was, of course, wonderful heat and hot water on

the day of the judge's visit. He fined the landlord a paltry \$1,000 for all our years without heat, hot water, or basic repairs. Shortly, all services were again discontinued.

After the courts and the city refused to act, the tenants' association pressured the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac), which held the mortgage, to address conditions. After a couple of inspections they promised they would foreclose, based on the clause in the mortgage requiring timely repairs.

Freddie Mac served notice of default on Mr. Chimienti on April 25 of this year; in less than a week, the building was under new management. Mr. Chimienti net-leased the building to a Mr. James Nadel, whose approach to building management is even more creative than Mr. Chimienti's. As a last resort, roughly one-third of the tenants had gone on rent strike last winter. From the day Nadel took over, he and two companions would knock on tenants' doors at 9 o'clock every night demanding the rent. Nadel told one woman receiving a Section 8 rent subsidy that he would see to it that she lost her subsidy if she continued on rent strike. He told a tenant with a large family that if he kept going to housing court, Nadel would have him evicted for having too many people in the apartment. Nadel's lawyer told me that if I kept complaining to Freddie Mac I would be liable for interfering in Mr. Nadel's contract with Mr. Chimienti.

Tenants are exhausted, and most are intimidated by the new owner's threats. Next winter does not look to be much better than previous ones. The really scary thing about this whole story is that, compared to many others, our building is a lot better off. If a well-organized tenants' association in a building like ours cannot get repairs done, what about all those buildings out there that are in worse shape and whose tenants are not organized?

IRENE M. BALDWIN

No runs, six errors

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: The heading *Commonweal* put over my recent letter, "Novak on Capitalism," may have misled Mel Piehl [Correspondence, June 14]. The true sub-

ject is "democratic capitalism," for I am not in favor of capitalism apart from the workings of democracy. And by "democratic capitalism" I mean a tripartite system that grants the legitimacy of political interventions in the economy, such as the legislation of the Progressive Era that so agitates Mr. Piehl in his response. Thus while failing to rebut my charge that his earlier article had erred three times, his reply to my letter again errs three times.

First, he writes that the lay letter "was issued shortly before the first draft of the pastoral with the plain intent of preemptively countering its widely expected emphases." But this attribution of intention is both malicious and false. We asked Archbishop Weakland to choose when our letter should appear, either during the brief five-day window between election-day 1984 (a Tuesday) and the following Sunday, when the bishops' pastoral would be released, or later. The implication was that if our letter came out first, it would appear as a recommendation, of the sort the bishops were actively soliciting; and if it appeared later, it would appear as a



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criticism. The archbishop preferred the first, and so did we.

Second, Mr. Piehl accused *Toward the Future* of pointing "toward restoring unregulated capitalism." This, too, is false. No one would have accused our letter of being "preemptively" launched if it had been stupid or uninteresting; indeed, the election news would have swamped it. What made it surprising was that it was neither a statist document nor libertarian. It was, in fact, a democratic capitalist document. It conceded the legitimacy of the legislation that Mr. Piehl so uncritically recommends, which in any case is the law of the land. We accept that law. And we are profoundly grateful for the tripartite structure of the system which makes the rule of law work.

Third, Mr. Piehl accused us of excluding "the structurally unemployed" from social assistance; but we in fact included them. Both Christian conviction and natural law lead us so to include them. Similarly, without citing any evidence Mr. Piehl in McCarthyite fashion wonders about my recent support for labor unions. But he apparently did not read pages 35-37 of *Toward the Future*, in which our very strong support of labor unions was so much more spirited than that of the bishops' first draft that even Monsignor George Higgins used it to shame the bishops into doing better in their next draft.

Indeed, a number of scholars (including some on the left) have noted that the bishops' final draft was closer to the lay letter than their first draft. However that may be, the lay letter was fully in the spirit of *Centesimus annus*, about which we are overjoyed, and to which we yield admiring assent.

Meanwhile, Mr. Piehl's problems are twofold. He finds it hard to be fair to those with whom he disagrees. And his ill will blinds him to the middle ground between his own statism and libertarianism. Both the lay letter and *Centesimus annus* occupy that middle ground.

MICHAEL NOVAK

The author replies:

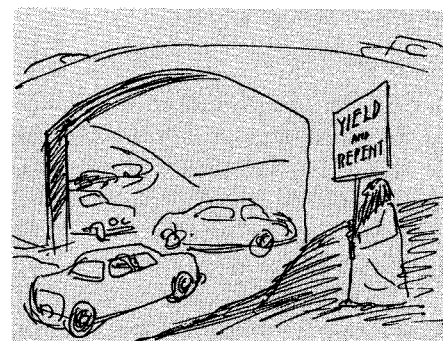
Matters of timing aside, it still seems clear that the "lay letter" developed essentially as a reaction to the bishops' initiative rather than as an autonomous enterprise.

The important question is whether or not *Toward the Future* endorsed Progressive economic regulation. Mr. Novak says that it "conceded the legitimacy of the legislation" regulating the economy as "the law of the land." But he cites no evidence from the document to that effect. That is because neither *Toward the Future* nor *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* contains so much as a favorable reference to any pieces of economic regulation. The examples of regulation are uniformly described in hostile terms: "It [the government] may harass executives through wiretaps, FBI visits in the night, investigations, and subpoenas. At the extremity, it can nationalize entire industries" (*Spirit*, p. 173).

Because such scary hyperbole constitutes the only concrete discussion of the central issue of American political economy for the past century—when and how a democratic government ought to regulate corporate enterprise for the common good of the society—it is quite fair to describe these works as advocating unregulated capitalism. Without attention to the regulatory question, the general language of "tripartite structures" and "democratic capitalism" serves a rhetorical rather than an analytic function. If, as he says, Mr. Novak now accepts such regulation—though it sounds more like grudging acquiescence than positive endorsement—that represents a new position that no one could infer from his previous works.

I do not "uncritically" endorse economic regulation. Some of it is wrong-headed or unenforceable, and there is good reason to fear both excessive state power and corporate misuse of regulatory mechanisms. But close examination of such regulation will show, I believe, that much of it has worked to the good of society, the environment, and business itself—though few business people recognize it. Certainly, the removal or nonenforcement of much regulation in the past decade, e.g., of the savings and loan industry, has not exactly served the public interest.

Toward the Future contains no discussion of the structurally unemployed, nor of what kind of government assistance such able workers should receive (e.g., permanent unemployment compensation, retraining for new jobs, or the minimal welfare of general assistance). The few paragraphs



on unions in the document combine generalized praise of their contributions to democracy with some specific statements that convey ambiguous messages to those familiar with labor questions, e.g., the emphasis on "voluntary association." That was why I expressed uncertainty about whether Mr. Novak and Mr. Simon supported strict enforcement of the National Labor Relations Act—the key legislation governing labor-management relations. It is a reasonable question, still unanswered.

Readers can judge for themselves the validity of Mr. Novak's charges of McCarthyism. I think they will find my variety closer to Gene's than to Joe's.

MEL PIEHL

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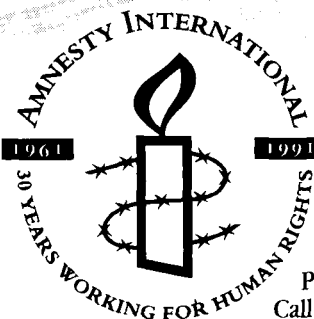
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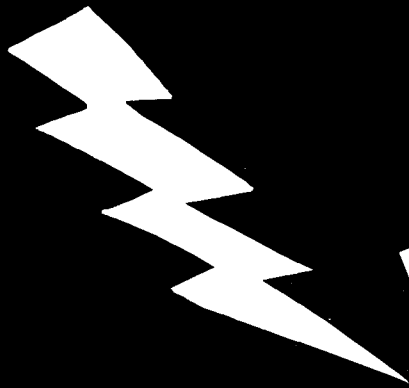
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